DANGANRONPA IF

Dangan Ronpa IF

Monobear's Monolgue

The world, you see, is full of 'If's.

Without the If of Eve being joined with Adam, society as we know it would never have existed. This world in which you live is only one of countless Ifs, constantly being propelled forward like a pool of mud by these possibilities. Miso soup no naka de, if you will.

What follows is an Iffy world where Ifs If Ifs. An uncertain Klein bottle where the surface and the inside are one and the same. ...Oh, don't break it, now. None of you bastards could afford to pay for it.

Ahem. Anyway, this is a world of Ifs. You could speculate and guess and make conjectures all you like, but only the future is a flexible pool of mud. The past is more solid than a -40 degree banana. The past can't be changed, and looking into 'A World That Could Have Been' won't save anyone in the real world. After all, an If is only an If. And even if there was a sickening parallel world where that particular If became real,

humans can't cross those lines so easily. In this case, all Ifs are Divergence Ifs.

...You still wanna see it? You've got some sick hobbies, you know that?! Don't you think that's like desecrating Naegi-kun and the others' efforts? They're moving forward past that tragedy now, you know! ... I'd still heap desecration on them, though. Upupupupu...

If you really wanna see this If, then it would be best if you looked at the surface of the Klein bottle first. Maybe start by playing this game called "Dangan Ronpa" through to the end. And try to play multiple times so you get to hang out with Junko Enoshima about three times. And if you finish collecting all the items and movie clips, you're just about perfect to go.
But I guess the fact that you're already here means you obviously did all that. I'd still buy it, though. I'd still buy two copies of Dangan Ronpa!

Dangan Ronpa IF

The Escape Switch of Hope and the Catastrophic Disappointment of Despair

"What should I do...?"

Makoto Naegi was at a loss.

His predicament was exceedingly simple, and could be divided into three categories. The first was that he was currently trapped inside the Hope's Peak Private Academy, a school attended by students with Super High School Level Talent. Naegi, chosen by a draw for the talent of Super High School Level Good Luck, came to the school for the first time that day to attend the entrance ceremony. There he suddenly lost consciousness, and when he woke up, he found that the doors and windows had all been sealed.

The second was the existence of a mysterious robot calling himself Monobear (and the mastermind behind it). "If you wanna leave this school, you have to kill someone", he had declared. The strange remote-controlled robot was telling Naegi and his fellow Super High School Level students that they were to earn their freedom through murder. Multiple Monobear robots were in existence, and each one of them contained a bomb to prevent them from being attacked. Not only that, Monobear had promised a punishment for anyone who harmed him.

Finally, the third was the fact that Naegi was currently holding a button. A red button, and the words "Escape Switch" scrawled upon it with a marker. Although the his first two predicaments were excellent causes for panic, this third problem only left Naegi troubled.

He had noticed during free time that the school store was open, and found himself compelled by curiosity. When he entered, the chaotic interior very nearly made him dizzy, but then he caught sight of something that resembled a capsule toy machine he often saw at supermarkets. The words "Monomono Machine" were written on it, and it seemed to take only the Monobear coins they found scattered in the school sometimes.

It looked rather tacky, but it might help them escape the school, he thought, and inserted the one Monobear coin he had collected. The result was this mysterious "Escape Switch".

There should have been a limit to teasing people. Naegi was almost discouraged by the switch, assuming it to be a cruel joke on the mastermind's part.

However,

"But... what if?"

That an entirely plain, ordinary boy like him was granted entry to this school was thanks to the fact that he was chosen in a draw as a bearer of Super High School Level Good Luck. And maybe that Good Luck was real.

If this switch is real, then... Maizono-san...

Naegi took a deep breath and pressed the switch.

His body was instantly struck by an intense burst of pain.

"Whoa?!"

His hands and feel went limp as he fell on the spot, unable to hold his body still. With ragged breaths he tried to figure out what had just happened to him.

Was I... electrocuted?

There was a small needle sticking out of the switch. Naegi realized that an electric current must have been

flowing through it. As he lay on the floor, waiting to recover enough to stand again, he fell into thought again.

So it was fake all along, huh.

What kind of sick enjoyment was the mastermind deriving from all this?

I still feel a bit dizzy.

I think I'll just go back and sleep...

Naegi got to his feet, and step by careful step, left the school store behind him.

Naegi had no idea. The truth was, the mastermind would have been a kinder person if the switch really was fake. A small shadow squirmed inside the deserted store. The shadow of a bear.

Monobear looked at the machine silently for some time, but seconds later, he burst into laughter without his expression so much as twitching.

"Upupupupu... Upupupupupu..."

Despite the fact that he was alone, Monobear spoke as though he was conversing with someone. Or as though Monobear himself was speaking to the mastermind wearing his skin.

"I put this switch in here because I thought it might be fun if the last couple of survivors got lucky at the Monomono Machine, but I never thought he'd draw that 0.00000001% possibility. A one-in-a-hundred-million chance? Is this what it means to have Super High School Level Good Luck?"

Monobear blushed and began breathing harshly. Obviously, a robot like him had no reason to breathe, but he was running on futuristic technology, squirming as though he was a living creature.

"Naegi-kun, who was chosen by draw, picked out the Escape switch in a draw. This normally never happens, does it? Is this what they call a miracle? Systems all GreeeeN for escape? Something beyond my understanding has entered the world of a Miracle Virgin like me? Hah... Hah... No no but I felt like I was going to die of excitement at the new possibilities! Cut to commercials!"

Monobear's exorbitantly elaborate built-in machinery ran at full throttle as he shuffled through expressions more smoothly than even a human being could. But he suddenly cut himself short, erased every expression from his face, and spoke through his speakers.

"Buuuuuut... Is this really a stroke of good luck? Nyohohoho... Puhyahyahyahya..."

Whispering to himself, Monobear allowed his laughter to fill the tiny room, with hope and despair--the two emotions representing the incident ahead--in equal measure.

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The next day, at Makoto Naegi's room

Makoto Naegi lay on his bed, his mind lost in a desperate struggle between despair and hope.

Monobear had given each student a DVD. Naegi's showed a scene insinuating that his parents and younger sister were in danger, and so he found himself with the determination to leave this school. It seemed as though the other students had also been shown shocking videos of their own. Something so shocking that they seriously began to contemplate the idea of escaping the school, even at the cost of a life.

But it was also clear that Monobear was laying out a trap. If a student was to kill another, he or she would graduate and leave the school. It looked like the mastermind behind Monobear would do anything to start off this game of murder. But what worried Naegi the most right now was the state of Sayaka Maizono, who seemed to have been hit the hardest by the DVD.

Maizono was a Super High School Level Idol who was also Naegi's classmate from Nekuro Roku Junior High. They had only really spoken in the past few days, but her optimism was a constant support for Naegi--and it went the same way for her.

If nothing else, I have to save Maizono-san... Naegi thought, when he was suddenly struck by a light headache.

...?

Was it the shock of being punched by Mondo Oowada the previous day, or an aftereffect of pressing the escape switch? Naegi ran through the possibilities in his mind, but soon the pain dissipated and he found himself even more determined than before.

Anyway, we have to all work together and- huh?

He realized that his determination was slightly different.

We 'all' have to...?

Naturally, escaping the school with all of his classmates was the most ideal scenario. But other than Maizono, he had never met any one of his classmates before, and he had no idea if he could trust them. Yet for a moment, he found himself believing that they were people worth helping even at the cost of his own life, just like Maizono.

Why?

The headache struck again. It was a strange sensation, like an artery in his brain splitting open.

Why did I just think that... I could trust everyone as much as Maizono-san...?

Naegi tried desperately to figure out why his mindset had shifted. Something was off. The pulsating pain in his head seemed to be going hand-in-hand with the sensation of something approaching him little by little. And just as he began to see a ray of light inside the fleshy darkness within his own skull, the doorbell rang.

Someone's here...

He quickly clambered off his bed, but the headache only worsened, He gave security no thought as he opened his door defenselessly, and came face-to-face with Sayaka Maizono.

"I'm sorry for bothering you so late..."

"Maizono-san...?!"

The pain.

"Why are you here at this hour...?"

The moment he caught sight of her, the pulsating pain grew quicker and quicker. It felt as though his world was being torn down from the inside out.

"I'm sorry... Something strange just happened... Naegi-kun? What's wrong? You don't look well..."

Maizono had been trembling and pale when she appeared before Naegi, but she looked like she was surprised by

Naegi's even worse complexion.

"Oh, yeah... I... I'm fine... It's just... a head-"

Naegi was unable to finish his sentence. His eyes rolled back as he slowly collapsed on the carpet, Sayaka Maizono's beautiful scream ringing over his head.

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The next day, at the Infirmary

"Oh, you're awake! G'morning! You okay? How many fingers am I holding up?"

Naegi's vision returned to the sight of fingers adorned with fake nails waving before his eyes.

"Huh... huh? Wha...? E... Enoshima-san...?"

"Hey, why do you sound like you're not sure about my name? I'm just a tiny bit hurt."

Despite what she had said, the girl called Enoshima--Junko Enoshima, the Super High School Level Fashion Girl--was laughing. Naegi looked around and found himself in an unfamiliar space. It looked somewhat like a hospital, with three beds (including his own) lined up in the room. All kinds of medical instruments were laid out around them. The pitch-black ceiling felt rather oppressive, but Naegi's mind immediately hit upon one possibility as he sat up.

"Where are we...? Did we get rescued?!"

"Weeell, if only." She replied, looking away. She explained that they were in the school infirmary on the first floor.

"That stupid Mononbear said, 'I can't bear to see my dear students getting sick' or something, and opened up this place this morning. But isn't it totally suspicious? What if all the medicine here is actually poison?"

"To be honest, I think that's a real possibility..."

Naegi remembered his misadventure with the self-proclaimed Escape Switch and sighed.

"...Come to think of it, what are you doing here, Enoshima-san?"

"If you want to thank someone, go to Maizono. She was looking after you all night."

"Ma-Maizono-san?!" Naegi exclaimed.

"Yup! But then Ishimaru went and started getting all fired up about taking turns looking after you. And it just turns out I happened to be on duty! Togami just ditched, though."

"I-I see... Thank you."

"I tooold you, you should save the thanks for Maizono. Anyway, how're you feeling? Is everything all right?"

"Huh? Well..."

Naegi thought for a moment, and recalled something that had been bothering him earlier--before he had lost consciousness.

"...This might sound... a little weird, or... well, it is a really weird question, but..."

"What is it?"

"Enoshima-san. We've never met before... have we?"

Her eyes turned to dinner plates as she gaped for a few moments. But the girl soon burst out into laughter.

"What? What're you talking about? Are you trying to hit on me?" A rather serious look crept into her grin. "Just

warning you, don't expect too much. I might look like this, but I totally care about my virginity!"

"Uh... no, I mean... expectations aside, I never..."

"Well, that's totally expected. I mean, you're pretty obviously an herbivore man..."

Naegi spent some time talking with her. Although he was slightly concerned about the fact that she did not leave to get the others, instead choosing to talk with a guy like him, Naegi did not ask why. He just wanted to talk to someone, anyone. He felt as though he would figure out the truth behind the things squirming in his head by spending time and interacting with the other students here.

Ten minutes later.

Naegi and the girl talked about things like 'herbivore men and carnivore women', her time living on the streets, and about the past and dreams for the future. The final topic was a lot heavier than the ones preceding it, but she seemed to have been cheered up by Naegi's calmness. She put on a sincere smile and whispered,

"Thank you, Naegi."

Perhaps in exchange for listening to her, she expressed a rather terrifying sentiment with that same smile on her face.

"If I ever decide to kill someone, I'll make sure it isn't you!"

Please don't say scary things like that... Naegi thought, but the words that came out his mouth expressed a different idea.

"I see... Thanks. But I still wouldn't want you to kill anyone..."

For some reason, Naegi felt as though her horrific words were completely natural. She seemed to be the most surprised about Naegi's reaction as she quickly stumbled forth.

"You-you thought I was being serious? I was just joking, Naegi! It's just a joke!"

"Huh?! Oh, uh, right! Sorry! That was weird of me."

"Don't worry about it. Let's just say you were totally having a fever dream!"

The girl's tone became light again as she stretched on the spot and turned to Naegi.

"I'm going to go back now, so try to stay alive until the next person gets here, okay?"

Naegi sent her off, and thought to himself as he lay in the bed.

What... is this feeling...?

The dull headaches continued, and his thoughts became foggy.

I was just talking to Enoshima-san, but it's as though... I was talking to someone else...

Who? Who? ...Who is she?

The more he thought, the more it felt as though his memories were sinking into a bog. But it also felt like the pulsing pains were creating waves on the surface of that same bog.

What... am I feeling...?

It was an unpleasant sensation, as though someone was calling to him inside his head. Naegi tried to go over everything that had happened to him so far, but his thoughts were interrupted by the sound of a bell.

The infirmary did not have doorbells like the dormitory rooms. The sound was a chime that was echoing throughout the entire school building.

"Ah, ah. Testing, one-two. This is a school announcement."

Monobear's voice was coming from the speakers.

"Now that Naegi-kun is awake, all students must gather in the gymnasium."

Naegi got off the bed like on Monobear's heartless order.

I have to go...

He stepped forward one foot after the other, his movements dictated by the rhythm of his headache.

Slowly and slowly he made his way forward, not knowing if his path led him to heaven or hell.

Dangan Ronpa IF

At the Gymnasium

"Naegi-kun! Are you all right?"

Maizono came running to Naegi's side as soon as he staggered into the gymnasium.

"Yeah... I'm fine. Sorry about yesterday. I must have made you worry."

"Not at all! It's my fault for barging in when you were feeling sick..."

"Come to think of it, what did you want yesterday?" Naegi asked. Maizono shut her eyes for a moment, then flashed him a practiced smile and shook her head.

"I-it's nothing... I'll tell you later."

"?"

Suddenly, Ishimaru Kiyotaka--the Super High School Level Hall Monitor--came up to them and pointed at Naegi.

"You're late, Naegi-kun! Explain yourself!"

The other students frowned, obviously wondering why Ishimaru was demanding this answer from someone who was sick. But Naegi smiled kindly and quickly gave his answer.

"I was sleeping in the infirmary because I wasn't feeling well. Could you put my name down on the class note*?"

"Of course! Excellent, Naegi-kun. It matches up perfectly with my information. If that is the case, you are

completely excused!"

The conversation went along smoothly. Ishimaru grinned and continued.

"Hahaha! I'll make sure to fulfill my responsibilities as hall monitor, so focus on your convalescence, Naegi-kun! And if your condition worsens, check in with a member of the Health Committee immediately! Uh... It seems we'll have to appoint one as soon as this meeting is adjourned." Ishimaru mumbled, opening up a class note he found in the school's storage room and walking away. Seeing this, Celestia Ludenberg, the Super High School Level Gambler, came up to Naegi.

"That reply of yours sounded surprisingly used to his unusual demands."

"Huh?"

Her comment snapped Naegi back into reality. The fact that he was sleeping in the infirmary because he was unwell was true. But for some reason, when Ishimaru asked the question everyone already knew the answer to, Naegi did not feel at all annoyed. It was as if he had expected such a question from him. He wondered why he had accepted Ishimaru's quirks as something normal so quickly. He did not understand why he had said something so unnecessary like "put my name down on the class note".

Why did I say that? It's as if... I was used to it.

It was just like the way people breathed without consciously moving their lungs. Somewhere in his mind, the idea that 'Answering like this will make the conversation go smoothly' had come up and out of his mouth in sentences.

Why? Why?

Each time he tried to find out why, the headache worsened. Naegi stumbled through his thoughts, when suddenly--

A monochrome doll popped up from behind a table set up in the gymnasium and spun around as it spoke in a clear voice.

"Ah, is everyone here?"

He sounded as though he was leading the students on a picnic, but no one looked particularly in the mood.

"What's next? Are we gonna seajack a luxury cruise liner and come face-to-face with a gigantic worm?"

Of course, the one exception was the Super High School Level Fortune Teller, Yasuhiro Hagakure. He still thought the school was staging an event for them. Monobear ignored him and spoke in a cutesy tone.

"Today I'm gonna teach you bastards about our wonderful school system. 'System', huh? Isn't that such a nice word? It smells almost as dangerous as a bear! I hope you bastards grow up to be real hardboiled villains who can trample over the corpses of your friends. I don't mind naughty students, as long as they're malicious!"

The incomprehensible introductory statement came to a close. Monobear continued, bringing to light the despicable system in the school--the school trial.

"---...So, that means just killing someone isn't enough. You have to kill them without anyone else finding out."

Monobear went on about the rules pertaining to graduation. But perhaps because there hadn't been any murders so far, the students did not seem to be in much despair. If no one was killed, there would be no trial. But they could not guarantee that a murder would not occur. As the students stood in suspicion and doubt, Monobear continued his explanation...

"H-hey, wait a second!"

One of the girls stepped forward as Monobear explained about the executions dubbed "punishments".

"Enoshima-san...?"

As Naegi watched the girl unleash her anger, the rhythm of his pulsating headache began to change.

"What you've been saying... It's all messed up!"

"Huh?"

The Fashion Girl raised her voice in complaint. She looked like a different person from the smiling student in the infirmary.

Was Enoshima-san... always like that?

No. She's different. Enoshima-san acts like that, sure, but...

Was she really Enoshima-san?

...? Huh? What am I thinking...?

As Naegi struggled with his confusion and headache, the back-and-forth between Monobear and the girl continued.

"So what are you saying? You're not going to cooperate? If you don't, I will have to penalize you!"

"Huh? Penalize...?"

"Maybe I'll lock you up in a dark, scary prison..."

No.

This time, Naegi's suspicions fell on Monobear.

Lock her up?

No... They... they wouldn't... stop there...

A series of images flashed through his mind, leaving Naegi with the impression that he had just watched a parade. But he realized that was a mistake. What he saw were buildings on fire, and the red lights illuminating the scenes were originally inside the bodies of people.

Despair.

It wasn't confined to just the school, or even Japan. Images of death and destruction all over the world slowly popped up in his mind, all to the rhythm of his pulsating headache.

I... I've seen all this before...

Other than the fact of the indescribable violence taking place in the images, there was one thing connecting them all.

'They'? Who are 'they'...? They're...

The images rampaging in his memories contained pillagers wearing monochrome masks. They took away everything--money, valuables, lives, families, dignity, pasts, futures, or--hope.

The masks of the pillagers looked identical to the face of the doll arguing with the students before him.

"Shut up! I don't care what you say. I'm never going to go along with this!"

"It's your body. Do whatever you want!"

"You're the one doing whatever he wants! Go on, I won't have anything to do with your sick game!"

"Your overwhelming display of rage... actually kinda scared me. B-but I... I won't give in to evil! This is the Monobear way, fighting to the very end. So... if you want to move forward, you'll have to go through me!"

Monobear swung his arms around as he charged at the girl with pitter-patter steps. But she stomped down on the self-proclaimed headmaster with ease.

"Eeek!"

"Satisfied?" She asked, eyes wide open. Monobear spoke, still pinned underfoot.

"That's what I should be asking you."

"What?"

"Violence against the headmaster is forbidden. It's in violation of the school rules..."

A chill ran down Naegi's spine.

Enoshima-san is going to be killed.

It was because Monobear's words carried a tone of terrible danger. It was not a suspicion or a guess. It was as though Naegi knew the danger represented by the symbol of Monobear from the beginning.

At this rate... he's going to kill...

His mind had not yet fully understood the circumstances. But as he raced towards his memories of the truth, he found himself racing forward physically as well.

Enoshima-san...?

His feet landed on the floor in beat with the dull aching of his head. He felt dizzy.

No... She's...

She's...--

"Summon magic! Save me, Gungnir the Spear!"

Monobear's high-pitched scream came at almost the very moment that Naegi rushed towards the girl, screaming her name.

"Ikusaba-san! Look out!"

"What...?"

The girl who claimed to be Junko Enoshima widened her eyes in shock. Perhaps in an attempt to avoid Naegi as he charged towards her, she stepped back with speed and reflexes unthinkable for a teenaged girl. And at that very moment, countless spears pierced the place where she had been standing only a moment earlier.

"...Ugh?!"

The sudden turn of events left the girl and the other students wide-eyed in shock. Contraptions installed in the gymnasium floor and walls had suddenly shot out spears towards her, not that Naegi himself could tell.

Huh? Why... Why'd I call Enoshima-san... Ikusaba-san...?

...Ikusaba...?

As he grasped for answers, he felt a sharp impact in his side, followed by deathly pain running down his spine and carrying through his entire body. The spear lodged in his side tore apart his muscles and shot out his back, covered in blood and lipids. At that very moment, the dark fog in his mind was dragged into death itself, as his struggling consciousness remembered everything.

Because of the special electrical signal and the chemical formula the escape switch had provided him with, Makoto Naegi had found escape. He had found an escape from the game where he and his classmates had been robbed of their memories and forced to play a deadly game of despair.

Of course, in terms of the fact that this had led him to a life-or-death situation, perhaps he had only escaped into a pit of greater despair.

At the same time, his actions had led yet another person into despair. She was a girl who had disguised herself as her beloved little sister Junko Enoshima, concealing her own identity. The Super High School Level Soldier (Super High School Level Despair), Mukuro Ikusaba. Her past, her future, or perhaps, her hope itself.

For the moment, Makoto Naegi's story comes to an end here.

Following it is the story of a certain girl--a girl more wrapped up in disappointment than anyone in this sealed-off

school.

"Huh...?"

Time came to a standstill for Mukuro Ikusaba. It was as though everything around her had frozen over instantly. It was a familiar sensation to her, from a time before she had been known as the Super High School Level Soldier--back when she was still a member of the mercenary group known as 'Fenrir'. Even when she was surrounded by enemies in the depths of the jungle or inside ancient ruins in the desert, this sensation of seeing her enemies stopped in a single moment in time allowed her to grasp victory from the jaws of despair.

But for some reason, this ability of hers was activated--not in a war zone or a battlefield, but in a place like this. Why? Ikusaba took her time in her unmoving world, trying to understand what had just happened.

Though their family names were different, Junko Enoshima was her younger sister, connected by the bonds of blood. She was also a fellow member of--no, someone much more deep inside the ranks of Super High School Level Despair.

Ikusaba was participating in a plan to bring about the ultimate despair, pretending to be her sister--the one who was masterminding the plot. Their classmates had lost the past two years' worth of their memories, and she would join them in playing this game of mutual murder.

Their plan was for Ikusaba to pretend to rebel against Monobear (who was controlled by Junko) during the early stages of the game. As punishment, she would be imprisoned in an underground chamber from which she could not communicate with the others. Then she would leave the chamber, and begin wreaking all kinds of havoc in order to rob their classmates of hope.

This was her role.

When Naegi collapsed with a headache, Junko ordered her to see if his sudden breakdown hadn't resulted in his memories returning unnecessarily. Thanks to the fact that he happened to awaken while she was on duty, Ikusaba got the chance to pretend to make small talk with him while trying to see if anything had gone awry with their plans. But Naegi did not seem to have remembered anything.

Until this point, she foresaw no problems. Nothing could possibly go wrong. She stomped on Monobear, perfectly reciting the lines Junko wrote out for her earlier. Afterwards, she would be isolated from the other students. This was her role. She had played it to perfection.

Nothing could go wrong. Nothing could go wrong. She repeated it like a mantra in her head over and over again. And in the frozen moment before her eyes was the sight of countless spears piercing the place she had been only a moment earlier, instead of the pitfall they had planned on--and Makoto Naegi's body, his side impaled on one of the spears.

Why?

Naegi-kun?

Those spears.

Gungnir?

If I hadn't stepped back, I would have died.

Did Junko make a mistake? No. She couldn't have.

Was she going to kill me? Her own sister?

Did Naegi-kun save me?

Why?

He called my name. Has he remembered everything?

Did I... not notice?

Did I make a mistake?

Is that why? Is Junko... angry at me?

Is this a punishment?

Was it my own fault?

Junko tried to kill me... Me. Me. Me.

Time slowly returned to its normal flow. Mukuro Ikusaba slowly turned towards Naegi. She could feel the blood draining from her face.

The gymnasium was soon filled with the screams of the other students. The first cry probably belonged to Sayaka Maizono. But that didn't matter to Ikusaba.

Naegi-kun... why?

Makoto Naegi was a possessor of Super High School Level Good Luck. He was a classmate of hers for the past two years, and one of the sacrifices offered up to the altar of despair. He was also the boy who had provided her with an answer of sorts during their conversation in the infirmary. He was but a pawn in the master plan laid out by her sister, but somewhere down the line, Mukuro Ikusaba had begun to carry doubts deep down in her heart.

What did I want from Naegi-kun?

As her heart began to shift restlessly, her mind began racing.

"If I ever decide to kill someone, I'll make sure it isn't you!"

Was I... just pretending to be Junko?

Or was that the real me talking?

When was it that the seeds of doubt were sown in her heart? Was it this very moment when Naegi rescued her, or when they spoke in the infirmary? Or was it from the moment they met for the first time after Naegi had lost his memories in preparation for the game? Or...

Was it even before that?

Ikusaba stood in shock, her mind reeling. But Naegi slowly opened his eyes, the spear still lodged in his side.

"Oh... Ikusaba-san...?"

"Na-Naegi-kun...?"

The tone of the Super High School Level Fashion Girl had disappeared from Ikusaba's voice. Naegi lay on the gymnasium floor and looked up at her.

"Why... are you dressed up like... Enoshima-san...?"

He was smiling.

Perhaps he was no longer able to feel pain. Or perhaps something else was at work. But either way, Makoto Naegi had put the matter of his own survival from his mind for that moment in order to show Ikusaba that smile.

"I'm glad... you're not hurt... Ikusaba-san..."

Naegi's tone was feeble, sounding as though he would expire at any moment. And the moment she heard his voice, something within Ikusaba broke. A powerful impulse she held deep within herself tore through the wall of despair she had built up over it.

"No... This wasn't supposed to happen..."

She was unable to hold back that impulse any longer.

"No... No..."

And for the first time in her life, Mukuro Ikusaba released a cry of despair into the world.

A tiny shadow approached Ikusaba as she sat with her head in her hands, a scream still on her lips. It was the little doll she had pinned to the floor not too long ago--Monobear. His claws were raised as he approached her from her blind spot, his steps no longer a cutesy pitter-patter, but the silent steps of a predator stalking its prey.

And once he was within a step of Ikusaba, he raised his paw into the air, crouched down low, and leapt for her throat.

But a split second before his claws could reach the unguarded Ikusaba, someone leapt in between them and parried Monobear's attack with their bare hands. Monobear's charge was deflected, and he landed on the gymnasium wall.

"You wretch! What is the meaning of this?"

It was Sakura Oogami, the Super High School Level Wrestler. Having averted a second tragedy with her skills, she addressed Monobear with a voice that seemed to rumble from the depths of the earth itself.

"Not only did you attempt to kill Enoshima for having broken the school's rules, you also attacked Makoto Naegi, an innocent bystander. If you wish to continue such violence, you will find yourself without my cooperation in this inhuman game."

"How idiotic. You might as well have broken the school rules yourself with your actions just now." Said the sneering Byakuya Togami, a Super High School Level Heir. It looked as though he honestly did not care whether his fellow students were murdered or killed in the crossfire.

"Oh my. But she was only deflecting the headmaster's attack. Would it really constitute an act of violence?" Celes added, looking almost equally unflappable. But their surprisingly nonchalant attitude brought the other students back to their sense.

"Na-Naegi-kun!" Maizono cried as she ran towards Naegi, who lay bleeding on the ground. But Monobear interrupted her--with a tone that was entirely unlike what he had been using earlier.

"Look out! Get away from both of them, now!"

"Huh...?"

Monobear's surprisingly desperate voice stopped Maizono and the others in their tracks. As the students looked around at one another, Monobear walked up to them in an entirely businesslike manner, the stylized cuteness gone from he gait. And he spoke to them words that not even Mukuro Ikusaba could bring herself to believe.

"This is a very sudden turn of events, and I understand things might be a little confusing, but I'm requesting your assistance."

"...?"

Monobear pointed at Ikusaba as she slowly looked around at him.

"That despicable terrorist Mukuro Ikusaba and her accomplice Makoto Naegi are the ones responsible for locking you in this school!"

TIme stopped for Mukuro Ikusaba once more. But this time, it was as if this sensation was shared among all of the other students. Seconds passed as they stood rooted to the spot, before the Super High School Level Swimmer Aoi Asahina spoke up.

"What? No... That can't be true. It can't... Naegi's not a terrorist, is he? And... who in the world is 'Ikusaba'? That's Enoshima..."

Monobear slowly gave them his explanation.

"The real Junko Enoshima must be imprisoned somewhere in that school! In the worst case scenario, she might already be dead. But that terrorist Mukuro Ikusaba snuck in with you by researching the easiest among you to impersonate and masquerading as her. Probably so she could make sure this game of murder would run smoothly."

Monobear then gave his limbs a strangely robotic jerk as he introduced himself.

"The name's Besshiki Madarai. I'm a Super High School Level Hacker and your upperclassman. I've just hacked into the school system from the outside to steal control over Monobear!"

"What do you mean, you stole control? From who?"

"From the leader of the terrorists who's controlling this robot from the outside!"

What?

What are you saying, Junko?

Ikusaba trembled as she listened to Monobear's words. For a moment, she held on to the hope that, perhaps it was not her own sister that had tried to kill her. But once she allowed herself to think properly, it her hopes came crashing down in a heap of despair. Junko Enoshima had power great enough to turn all hope into despair. She would not allow Monobear to be hacked into so easily. In other words, the only possibility left was that Junko was playing the part of Besshiki Madarai in order to frame her and Naegi.

It was as though Junko was using Ikusaba's survival as a turning point point at which she could lead the students into the direction of another kind of despair. Monobear continued to calmly utter the kind of words that would drive the students into action.

"All of you were drugged with sleeping gas during the entrance ceremony, and the terrorists took you hostage while you were unconscious. Mukuro Ikusaba and Makoto Naegi should be their only operatives inside the school, though. They probably know a way to escape."

He then turned to Ikusaba, his tone dropping noticeably.

"Mukuro Ikusaba is a member of the Super American Military Level Mercenary Team called 'Fenrir'. She's a wanted criminal who's already murdered over ten people connected with this school. Don't get soft and try to capture her alive. Even the police wouldn't try something like that! I tried to kill her just now by using the trap

those terrorists installed themselves, but..."

"Then... what about Naegi-kun?" Maizono asked. Monobear's answer was plain and cold.

"...I can make a guess. What's Super High School Level Good Luck gonna do for you when you're up against Fenrir? Maybe he's been threatened since before you guys came to this school. And I really don't want to say this, but... judging from what he's done just now, maybe he's fallen for Mukuro Ikusaba!"

Maizono blanched as her mouth closed shut.

"No! Naegi-kun isn't a terrorist!" Ikusaba cried, raising her head.

Silence came over the gymnasium. And as though in an attempt to speak for the rest of the students, Ishimaru spoke up, covered in cold sweat.

"W-wait just one moment. What do you mean, 'Naegi-kun isn't a terrorist'...?"

"...Argh..."

"Is that not as good as acknowledging that you yourself are a terrorist? I ask that you correct yourself! 'We are not terrorists'!"

Celes continued where Ishimaru left off, voicing her own doubts.

"How strange. Since when did you start calling him Naegi-'kun'? You've never used an honorific for him in the past."

"..."

Ikusaba went silent. The other students were no longer looking at 'Junko Enoshima', but a suspicious stranger. Togami pushed up his glasses and coldly laid out his suspicions.

"That commoner Naegi called you 'Ikusaba', not 'Enoshima'. And if you truly are Ikusaba, not the fashion model Enoshima, then how did a total stranger like Naegi know your true name?"

"I... That's..."

"I also know about Fenrir. And I'm certain that you have a tattoo signifying your membership somewhere on your person."

"...!"

Togami's words actually compelled Ikusaba to regain her calm. It was a defence mechanism of sorts for facing down hostility. Her tattoo was located on the back of her right hand, but she wondered how she would deny that fact without drawing attention to that spot. But even this struggle was for naught.

"If the police records are correct, her tattoo should be on the back of her right hand!" Monobear said, rattling off her personal data.

"Y-yes! Enoshima-kun! Please show us the back of your right hand and prove your innocence once and for all!" Ishimaru cried. Monobear added in unnecessary comments of his own.

"Look real closely, now! She might be trying to hide it with foundation!"

Junko was the one who suggested concealing the tattoo with foundation. Therefore Monobear's information was completely accurate, and Ikusaba could do nothing but remain silent. It was not because she was trying to keep her identity a secret for as long as possible--it was because she realized that her sister was serious about trying to frame her.

"..."

"Wh-what is this silence, Enoshima-kun? As a classmate, I have faith in you!" Ishimaru said stubbornly. From behind him, Hifumi Yamada, the Super High School Level Doujin Author, muttered to himself with sweat running down his cheeks.

"Could this be... what they call a checkmate?"

"What the fuck, man! Spit it out already!" Mondo Oowada--the Super High School Level Gang Leader--roared.

Meanwhile, other students were trying to get answers out of Monobear.

"Hey, before that! Isn't anyone coming to help us from the outside? Just send in the cops!" Said Leon Kuwata, the Super High School Level Baseball Player. Monobear shook his head.

"The police are tied up. You guys are being held hostage, and there's a good chance this entire school is rigged with explosives or poison gas! That's why I took over Monobear here for reconnaissance purposes!"

"Then what about the people on our DVDs?! What about the people outside?!" Maizono cut in, remembering what she had seen yesterday, but Monobear would not give a clear answer.

"I don't know what DVDs you're talking about, but it's true that terrorists are running amok outside. We're talking something on the national level the entire police force is trying to fight."

"No...!" Maizono fell to her knees, trembling.

"Ma-Maizono-san..."

Beside Maizono was a fretful Chihiro Fujisaki, and behind them were two girls standing in silence. Averting her eyes from the bleeding Naegi was Touko Fukawa, the Super High School Level Literary Girl. The other was the stoic Kyouko Kirigiri, who refused to reveal her identity. Unlike Fukawa, her eyes were trained on the scene unfolding before them. It was as though she was observing everything, from Naegi's breathing to every tiny change in Ikusaba's expression.

Fukawa, who had been trembling alone all this time, approached Oogami.

"A-anyway, we can just say that girl over there's the culprit, right...? Hurry up and s-smash her, or something!"

"That has not yet been confirmed. My fists do not exist for carrying out executions based on groundless accusations."

Oogami made to approach Naegi to examine his wound, but Monobear stood between them with a cry of "Stay away!". In other words, Ikusaba was the nearest person to Naegi. But having slain countless people on the battlefield, she knew from experience that Naegi would die if he didn't receive first aid . His injuries were not immediately lethal, but the blood loss would send him into shock very soon, and he would lose his life.

"First... we have to help Naegi-kun..."

"Overruled. First, I demand you surrender and show us your right hand." Togami cut in, despite Ikusaba's best

attempt to speak.

"Wait a second! Naegi's in trouble! There's no time for negotiations!" Asahina said, worrying for Naegi. She was still having trouble catching on to the situation, not knowing whether she should suspect Naegi or not. Togami made to snap back at her, but Ikusaba's next course of action stopped him dead in his tracks.

She took a deep breath. Then she took off the blond wig she was wearing and tossed it aside. Underneath was a head of short, sleek black hair. Ikusaba wiped all expression clear from her face and spoke clearly, so that everyone in the gymnasium could hear.

"I'm... not Junko Enoshima. My name is Mukuro Ikusaba."

Her sudden confession left the students in a state of shock. The act of throwing aside her wig and abandoning all expression had cleared the existence of Junko Enoshima from before them. The terrorist who emerged from behind the facade stoically continued.

"I also took part in the plot to lock you all inside this school."

"Could this be?! Time for a Confession on the Cliff by the Sea?"

"H-hold on, Enoshima-I mean, Ikusaba-kun! This is in clear violation of school regulations! Students are forbidden to wear wigs on school premises!"

Yamada and Ishimaru exclaimed, staring off the chatter that soon broke out among the students.

"Huh? Wha...? So Naegi just got hurt for real? Then all this stuff 'bout terrorists is real, eh? These past few days weren't just some cool event?!" Hagakure wondered, finally realizing the gravity of the situation. Leon interjected with a "Shut up!", while Togami remained cool and collected, addressing Ikusaba.

"What are you after? If you wanted money, you would have approached me to negotiate from the beginning. Of course, I'd rather have thrown out the lives of every other hostage than cede to your demands."

"...Our purpose is to bring despair to the world." Ikusaba uttered. Togami snorted.

"Hmph. Monobear said the same thing. So your act of terrorism is based on an ideology? Doing anything to me would certainly affect the world enough to bring it despair, I'll give you that much."

Asahina frowned as she listened to Togami's claim.

"How selfish can you be...?"

Once Ikusaba understood that Togami had finished asking his questions, she glanced at Naegi--his breaths slowly going ragged--and allowed a sliver of emotion to tinge her voice.

"But Makoto Naegi has nothing to do with this. Please... don't believe what Monobear says."

"I got no idea what the hell you're talking about! You just said you're the culprit, just like the damn bear said!" Oowada roared, but Ikusaba closed her eyes and continued.

"Yes. That's true. But Naegi-kun has nothing to do with our plans...!"

"I don't think trying to pull suspicion away from him will help your case. After all, we all heard Naegi-kun say your name earlier." Celes said coldly.

"But... he..."

She could not go on. She could not find the words to protect Naegi, even though there was nothing more certain than the fact of his innocence. Although Ikusaba was a Super High School Level Soldier, her skills were largely limited to battle. In fact, even an average high school student could probably best her in matters of war strategy and negotiation.

Perhaps someone like a Super High School Level Negotiator could convince the others of their memory loss, but anything Ikusaba said now would probably sound like little more than a feeble excuse. She understood this full well--and yet, despite not knowing what to say, she had a clear idea of what she should do.

"...Right now, we have to get Naegi-kun some help."

She walked up to Naegi as though nothing had happened. Naturally, the other students saw it as her ending the conversation because things were not going in her favour.

"Wait. We will treat Naegi in the infirmary ourselves. But I ask that you allow yourself to be place under our custody." Oogami demanded, understandably for the situation.

But Ikusaba could not accept her terms. If she were to be separated from Naegi, Monobear had free rein to do whatever he wanted to him. He wasn't the only threat--the cold-hearted Togami or the rough and crude Oowada could easily do him harm under the pretence of interrogation.

And the most decisive reason for her refusal was that Ikusaba herself was likely the only one among them who had the medical knowledge to treat Naegi's injuries--the results of her years of experience working in Fenrir.

Once she had gone through these facts, Ikusaba narrowed her eyes and quietly came to a resolution. She would escape with Naegi, even if it meant destroying everything in her path.

"I apologize, but I will ask you to sleep a while." Oogami said, and instantly appeared behind Ikusaba. She had made for her blind spot in the blink of an eye, so quick that to most people it looked more like she had teleported. Her equally quick hands sped towards Ikusaba's neck.

"I'm sorry, Oogami. But I'm going to get out of here even if I have to force my way."

Ikusaba turned, repelling Oogami's strike with a roundhouse kick.

"What...?!"

Oogami raised an eyebrow at the unexpected counterattack. Ikusaba used the momentum of her own attack to try and kick down Oogami's knee from beside her. But this time, Oogami read her movements and reflexively

made to knock down the leg Ikusaba was standing on.

Ikusaba leapt up only a moment before her strike could land, and used the momentum from her jump to aim a kick at Oogami's chin. Oogami parried her attack with her arm. They landed a short distance away from one another, then charged simultaneously. They deflected each other's attacks with attacks of their own, and despite the fact that they were both fighting unarmed, the sounds of their battle rang out in powerful strikes that shook the gymnasium.

It was as though a typhoon had been compressed to the size of a car and left to run amok. The other students could neither join in nor look away, holding their breaths with their eyes glued to the scene.

Approximately ten seconds later, the sound of one final clash echoed across the gymnasium. The two warriors were facing each other down, breathing heavily.

"I have been careless. Though it has been but several days, I had not noticed the presence of a combatant of your caliber..."

Though Oogami was shocked by Ikusaba's abilities, she seemed to be rather enlightened by the battle. Meanwhile, Ikusaba noticed the injury Oogami inflicted on her arm and thought for a moment.

She's strong... but Oogami isn't even fighting seriously.

Ikusaba had been surrounded by countless firearms, blades, traps, and explosives during her time as a member of Fenrir, but this was the first real injury she had sustained in her life. Ikusaba shuddered at the power of the girl known as the Super High School Level Wrestler--and the strongest person in the world.

I knew it. I can't beat Oogami unarmed.

If she had been officially ordered to kill Oogami, Ikusaba would have elected to snipe her from a distance or poison her. At this range, perhaps she could barely fight on even ground if she was armed with an assault rifle.

I don't have time for this.

She glanced at Naegi, and confirmed that his breathing was getting weaker and weaker.

I have to hurry...

But she had no allies she could count on at this point.

At that very moment, Ikusaba remembered something--although it was impossible for her to turn someone into her ally, she could still create an enemy of an enemy.

Ikusaba took a sharp breath and charged in for a feint, pretending to attack Oogami while rushing towards another girl. Her target--Touko Fukawa, who had fled to a corner of the gymnasium in fear of the battle.

"No! It can't be...!"

Oogami had been caught off guard. She rushed after Ikusaba, but she was too late. Ikusaba made it to Fukawa one step ahead.

"Huh? Wh-who, me?"

"...I'm sorry."

"W-wait! I- gurk!"

Ikusaba lightly struck her in the solar plexus and slung her over her shoulder. Ishimaru and Asahina screamed.

"O-oh no! She must be trying to use Fukawa-kun as a hostage!"

"F-Fukawa!"

But in contrast to their terrified gasps, Togami snickered coldly.

"What an idiot. Did you honestly think I would falter for a hostage I've only known for the past few days?"

But Ikusaba looked at Togami and mumbled darkly.

"You haven't known her for the past few days."

"What?"

"You've known her for closer to two years."

"?"

Togami frowned. Ikusaba ignored him and showed Fukawa the blood flowing from her arm, and spoke into her ear.

"Awaken... Genocider Syo!"

"?!"

Ikusaba's call was entirely out of the blue. Why was the name of an infamous serial killer being brought up now? The students looked around at one another in confusion. But not a moment too soon, the groaning Fukawa suddenly kicked off the gymnasium floor.

She had leapt into the air higher than was capable for a normal human. Fukawa twirled in midair faster than a figure skater, several metres above the floor. Her skirt opened up like an umbrella as she spun, revealing multiple sets of scissors. On her thighs were countless " characters, like kill counts carved on fighter planes.

At any other time, her display of acrobatics would have been a sight to marvel at. The girl that was once Touko Fukawa cried out in ecstasy, her long tongue flopping from her mouth and her red eyes twinkling.

"You call me, I come out, and it's time for KILLING! Hyahahahaha!"

"F-Fukawa?" Maizono cried, breaking her lengthy silence at the sudden turn of events.

"Hey, you airheaded idol over there! Don't treat me like that disgusting glasses girl! Since she won't ever step into a bath, I put in quintuple the effort to scrub myself clean in the shower!"

"Eek!"

The sudden change in Fukawa's personality again sent out ripples of distress among the students.

"Hey, hey, hey! The hell's going on with her?!" Kuwata asked Monobear, but the bear only shook his head.

"Even I don't know everything."

The students were still reeling from all of the unexpected developments that were taking place. Fukawa, the self-proclaimed Genocider Syo, took out a pair of scissors and looked around gleefully, tilting her head.

"Oh, what's this? Anyway, it's been too long since I came out for a breath of air, but what did everyone get up to in the gymnasium while I was getting my beauty sleep? A mass orgy? Heh heh. Don't worry, I understand everything. And now you need me to slice up some clothes for even more titillating excitement... NOT! Who the hell would do that for you? My scissors are only for the flesh of tantalizing boys!" Syo rambled on by herself, but she noticed Naegi, who was collapsed on the ground.

"Hm? Is Naegi-chi dying? Wait, don't tell me all that despair out there got to you and you were about to go for a round of group suicide? That's really hot by itself, but why didn't anyone tell me about it before starting up?!"

"F-Fukawa? Please, snap out of it!"

Asahina's cries went ignored as Syo allowed her emotions to run amok. dancing wildly and brandishing her scissors.

"Aw, I don't believe this! I wanted to slit Naegi-kyun's side myself! And now I can't even hear him scream, even though I can see a tiny bit of his rib through that blood! But maybe I could get used to this isolation you're feeding me... Heh... Hehehehehehehe..."

"I don't know what's happenin' anymore! Aliens, I'm telling you!" Hagakure howled, cradling his head in his hands.

At this point, the students' attention was focused entirely on Genocider Syo. Ikusaba used their distraction to her advantage as she crept up to Makoto Naegi. She slowly lifted him into her arms. His temperature was dropping

quickly.

It's not too late.

It was a rough means of escape, but Ikusaba quietly ran for the doors, carrying Naegi behind her. And by the time the other students heard the sound of her opening the door, it was too late. Mukuro Ikusaba had successfully escaped the gymnasium, Naegi in tow.

Of course, not everyone in the gymnasium was caught off guard by Ikusaba's actions. Monobear had seen her movements through his sensors, but he did not alert anyone.

The one other person to have noticed their escape was Kyouko Kirigiri. Like Monobear, she also did not raise an alarm over their departure, merely seeing them off in silence.

And with the intentions of many contained within, Hope's Peak Academy slowly began to approach an entirely different sort of chaos than was first intended.

Carrying Naegi on her back, Ikusaba grabbed several trophies from the gymnasium entrance hall. And as soon as she stepped out into the hallway, she used them to jamm the doorknobs. Although they would not likely resist Oogami's strength, they would at least buy her a few seconds.

And so, Mukuro Ikusaba ran to the last place where she had spoken to Naegi--the infirmary, which would provide her with everything she needed to give him first aid treatment.

Dangan Ronpa IF

At the Infirmary

Her own sister was her enemy.

Her fellow Super High School Level students were her enemies.

Her only ally was the dying Makoto Naegi.

Ikusaba knew that not even she herself was her own ally. After all, despite the fact that Junko had betrayed her and very nearly killed her, Ikusaba still believed that she was the only one who could understand her little sister. And that was why she felt that she had to protect her.

That's right... you were just being you, Junko. You just wanted despair, right?

It's because you love me. You wanted to kill me and fall into despair. That must have been it. I'm sorry. I'm sorry I couldn't grant you that despair, little sis.

At the same time, she wondered--if she was able to, by some miracle, save Makoto Naegi and foil her sister's plans, wouldn't Junko fall into even greater despair? Wouldn't that make her even happier?

But... Betray Junko?

What am I supposed to do?

Mukuro Ikusaba closed her eyes, listening to Naegi's weak breathing.

Tell me, Naegi-kun. What should I do?

In battlefields, where she made her home, her main mission was to kill and survive. And in that setting Ikusaba was invincible. She could put her own emotions on a leash in order to become a killing machine.

However, when she was facing her own sister in the battlefield of a normal high school life (twisted as it may have been), Ikusaba could not control her emotions no matter how much she tried.

The Super High School Level Soldier, having begun to doubt the idea of Super High School Level Despair, had already been overtaken by the impulses of the normal high school student within.

But the girl continued running through the darkened corridors, holding on to her own conflicted self--she was treading the hair-thin line between the Hope of Makoto Naegi and the Despair known as Junko Enoshima.

Meanwhile, the students in the gymnasium were left in a state of utter confusion.

The Super High School Level Literary Girl, Touko Fukawa, had always come off as gloomy and difficult to approach. But it was as though her earlier persona had been thrown out the window.

"Fukawa-san... you're Genocider Syo?" Maizono asked nervously, trembling. Syo tilted her head a full fifty degrees, her tongue lolling.

"Huh? I didn't expect a reaction like that. Don't tell me I've been found out? Or didn't you already know? And what's with Gloomy Samurai, dolled up like that? That outfit looks like crap on her!"

By 'Gloomy Samurai', she was probably talking about Mukuro Ikusaba. But no one could remember to point out the shocking fact that Fukawa knew Ikusaba, thanks to the sudden onslaught of surprises that were set upon them.

Or, to be more specific, several students were able to keep their cool. But this group, which included Kirigiri and Togami, seemed to be hanging back in order to get a better grasp on the situation.

"All right, spill it. Somebody put a hole through Mako-rin, and I wonder who it is? Where do they live? But whether you stab him or slice him, I'm saying I totally can't let you get away with leaving such an inelegant wound in Mako-chi's side!"

Fukawa--no, Genocider Syo--spun her scissors around and around, her tone and expression constantly shifting in the middle of her sentences. No one could bring it upon themselves to approach her, but this was less because of the scissors she carried and more because of the air of danger she was radiating.

"To me, an inexperienced boy like Mako-run's side is like an inexperienced chicken that lays golden eggs! I could have cut him open and done a sexy job killing him! But someone just had to go and trample all over Mako-pyon, body and soul... I guess that's exciting in its own way! But I refuse!"

"F-Fukawa?! What's going on? What's happening?" Asahina yelled. Syo held up a pair of scissors to her face.

"What do you mean, what's going on? Nothing here, nothing there! Chuckles here suddenly locks me up for days, and she finally gets knocked out so I can spread my wings. Then I wake up to Mako-pyon's bloodstain fever. I don't know what's going on here! It's so confusing I think I'm gonna burst out laughing! Uhyahyahyahyahya!"

There was no getting through to Syo. Yamada made a timid comment.

"...I have a great deal of experience in dating 2-D yandere, but I believe this is perhaps not even a problem on the same scale, or rather, an SSS-class level of dating difficulty?"

"...I can't believe you can classify her as 'dateable' to begin with..." Kuwata sighed. It was clear that they were getting nowhere, so Oogami stepped forward as though answering the silent wishes of her fellow classmates.

"Hm. Perhaps she is in a state of confusion. I shall restrain her."

Syo stopped in her tracks, her reptilian tongue dangling as she put on an eerie smile.

"Hm? What's this what's this? You wanna try me, Ogre-chin? Sorry, but my scissors are only supposed to cut open moemoe-kyun boys! I don't need girls! You'll just get my scissors dirty!"

"I see that my words will not reach you."

Oogami readied herself to overpower Syo bodily, entering a fighting stance. Genocider Syo reacted with an unusual stance of her own, realizing that there was no way she could win in a fair match.

In a normal fight the Ogre would easily overwhelm Syo. But if the latter were to focus her efforts entirely on evasion, it would be difficult to foresee the outcome of the battle. Of course, only a few of the students could see through to Syo's physical capabilities.

The other students gulped as the two girls radiated an air of hostility. However, one person was focused on something else.

Kyouko Kirigiri's eyes were set on Monobear, who was sitting still in a corner of the gymnasium with static coming from his speakers. He had suddenly stopped functioning while everyone's attention was turned to Oogami and Fukawa. It would be simple to assume that Madarai's hacking had been interrupted, but countless other possibilities were running through Kirigiri's mind.

She swept back her hair with a gloved hand and continued her observation. Although she could not remember her own true identity, the instincts carved into her were working to propel her into these actions. This series of unusual events unfolding before her was rocking her to the very core.

Her mind raced to pick up pieces of information from the vast sea of her memories. And as if to match the rhythm of the ideas running through her synapses, Oogami and Fukawa kicked off the ground simultaneously. The gymnasium was shaken by a powerful impact.

The sudden outbreak of battle had bought Mukuro Ikusaba much more time that she'd bargained for. As soon as she stepped into the infirmary, she picked out first aid equipment to stop Naegi's bleeding, crude as her methods were. Hearing Naegi's weak but steady breathing, Ikusaba sighed quietly in relief.

However, the fact that she had stopped his bleeding did not change the fact that Naegi was still in critical

condition. His Super High School Level Good Luck had indeed saved his major arteries and internal organs. But would Naegi go on to curse his bad luck for the haphazard treatment that would leave him in agony? Ikusaba had no way of knowing.

"If only I could give him a blood transfusion..."

There were multiple blood packs stored in the infirmary. It occurred to Ikusaba that Naegi's blood type might be indicated on his Student ID card. She reached for his uniform.

"Oooooh~! Aaaaah! She reaches for the sleeping boy's clothes! What could possibly happen next? Adults can stay, but make sure to hit the B Button, kiddies!"

"Ugh!"

Ikusaba turned towards the familiar voice, a Monobear was standing behind her.

"Now it's just you and Naegi, all alone. I'm just a cute little wild animal, so let your body do the talking! As the headmaster, I guess I should step in to prevent any unseemly student relations. But physical education classes are A-OK, young lady!"

He looked identical to the one in the gymnasium, but this Monobear was obviously a different unit. There were multiple Monobear units placed all over the school, so it was not surprising for him to pop up anywhere.

But the mastermind controlling him was but one person. Ikusaba had been on guard, prepared for Monobear to attack as she treated Naegi, but she was surprised that he chose this moment to appear before them.

"I-is that you, Junko?" Ikusaba asked tentatively. Monobear tilted his head--no, his upper body.

"Junko? Who's that? Jun Ko? What country is she supposed to be from?!"

"...No more jokes. Please. Answer me, Junko. You were going to kill me. Weren't you?"

"Junko this, Junko that! I'm Monobear! And if you can't even remember that, you're even more of a disappointment than I thought you were! You're not just disappointing, you're a Disappointing Sister! You look like a malnourished kid, and your brain's made of muscle! And the only person you know is actually a bear!"

"I... um... I'm sorry."

Although there was nothing for Ikusaba to apologize for, the Super High School Level Soldier recoiled at hearing the word 'disappointment' from her younger sister, having been called this many times before. But Monobear

ignored both her apology and her circumstances, moving on to the unconscious Naegi and poking at his cheeks.

"So, what're you gonna do about Makoto Naegi now? You know I'm really interested in the mating habits of humans, right?"

"What do you mean, what am I going to do with him...?" Ikusaba hesitated. Monobear's tone dropped as he whispered to her.

"Upupupupu... Naegi's such a nice boy, isn't he? Doesn't it give you so much despair, knowing he's dying for someone else's sake! Upupupupu..."

"He-he's still alive!" Ikusaba protested, but her voice was tinged with fear.

"Upupupu... And that's what's so disappointing about you. You can't even say 'I won't let him die'!"

"Oh... I... I won't let him die, Junko."

As Ikusaba was pushed further and further back into a corner, Monobear burst into "Upupupu"s and "Uhyahyahya"s, continuing to berate her.

"As if you could! A catastrophic disappointment like you? Puhyahyahya! That's right, a disappointing, emotionless, un-ladylike and inhuman killing machine like you! Naegi was the first person in our class to smile for you, remember?"

The robot in the form of a carnivore suddenly began to talk about Ikusaba's past, despite insisting that he was Monobear and not Junko.

That unpredictability was very much like Junko Enoshima, but Ikusaba had been pulled into her pace completely,

allowing her sister to rattle her as she pleased.

"But in this world, the strong eat the weak to survive! That's why nice boys like him are going to die. And I'll prove it to you! Makoto Naegi is going to die! Upupupupu..."

"I... I won't let him die!"

Ikusaba's tone had become inconsistent ever since she had taken off her 'Junko Enoshima' wig. Except for what she had said in her conversation with Naegi, everything she said as Junko had been prepared beforehand by her sister. But now there was no script from her dependable little sister to work from.

Ikusaba was now treating the bear as she would Junko. If the other students could see her now, after her display of power against Oogami, she would probably look hopelessly weak at this point.

Not only that, if anyone who knew her as the Super High School Level Soldier and mercenary were to see her now, the difference in her attitude might even make her look like another person altogether. And Monobear continued to drive the girl into a corner.

"Wait. He will die. It's sad, but this is reality."

Monobear twisted his arms and legs around, then put up a finger towards Ikusaba.

"Because you're going to kill him with your own two hands!"

"What?"

"We'll call it an internal struggle among the terrorists. The cold-blooded terrorist silences the weak-willed Naegi before he could leak any information. Doesn't that happen all the time in movies? Then, all the desperate things you were saying the gymnasium back then will turn out to be lies you spouted in order to escape! Upupupupu..."

Ikusaba frowned.

"No, Junko... I... I won't let that happen."

Her voice was trembling. What was she doing, Ikusaba wondered to herself.

Am I... going against what Junko is telling me to do?

Why?

It was a strange sensation. Ikusaba was suddenly overcome by the fear of looking down from a high place and wondering what it would be like to jump. The destructive feeling of holding a friends's baby in one's arms and wondering what would happen if one were to trip over.

As a member of Fenrir and Super High School Level Despair, Ikusaba had killed countless people. She had taken care of hand grenades from which the pin had been pulled. She had parachuted down the sky in the midst of a barrage of anti-air fire. Her heart had never once been shaken on the battlefield, but now it felt as though it would collapse at the slightest touch. Meanwhile, Monobear shook his head, looking as steady as a deeply rooted tree.

"Hm? Weren't you listening to what I said?"

"...?"

"I said, I'm not going to kill him. You are."

"...What... are you saying, Junko?" Ikusaba uttered, confused.

Monobear put forth a strange explanation.

"You know what the real meaning of the 'suspension bridge effect' is? It means you drop your loved one off a suspension bridge so they'll be yours forever."

"...?! Th-that's not how I remember it..."

"Life doesn't always go the way the textbooks tell you they will. Sad, but this is love."

Monobear went on as though he had his lines memorized, but Ikusaba could not retort--in fact, she could not even think. Monobear continued his spiel, continuously spouting words designed to aggravate her.

"If you think about it, this is your chance. If you kill Naegi here, no one can take him away from you, you know. 'Makoto Naegi dies in the night. The last name he ever called was that of Mukuro Ikusaba. The last smile he ever showed was for Mukuro Ikusaba'. Doesn't that have a good ring to it?"

Ikusaba was badly shaken by Monobear's provocation. She was losing trust in her own judgement.

He's wrong. He has to be.

But Monobear is Junko, right? So, is he right?

No, this isn't her. This is Monobear. Monobear, Monobear, Monobear.

"And is it really going to be all right, letting Naegi live? Once he comes to, he'll spill the truth to everyone! Everyone'll know what you did to your classmates."

"...I...!"

"Erasing your friends' wonderful memories together and forcing them to kill each other? That's just sick. They'll hate you for it! Who knows? Naegi might get mad, saying, 'Our enemy wasn't the bear, but you'!"

"I..."

Ikusaba paled.

"Upupupupu... Or how about just killing all of the others? If everyone but you and Naegi die, then the two of you can spend the rest of your student lives together! After all, we can't even hold a trial if there's only two people left. Maybe it'll be best if you just hole up here, safe in the building forever!"

"No... I... I won't. I can't..."

"And what're you going to do once he goes back to his old self? It's not as if you were dating Naegi, right? You were just watching him from afar all this time! Now this is a shock. You can shoot right through people's heads and hearts without even blinking, but you can't even steal away some skinny little boy's heart! You want me to tell you who Naegi had a crush on before his memories were erased? Upupupupu..."

"Ah... I..."

Ikusaba trembled. The screws holding her heart in place began to loosen little by little, and Monobear did everything in his power to shake them loose even more.

"..."

Ikusaba's choice was to pretend not to hear. She put an emotionless mask and searched for Naegi's electronic student ID in silence.

"His blood type isn't on the ID, you know."

"What?"

Her silence was broken in five seconds. Ikusaba blanched and froze.

"But your headmaster here's at least half made of goodness and love! I'll tell you, just this once. In other words, Naegi's blood type is B!"

The moment Monobear disclosed the piece of information Ikusaba had been searching for all this time, the tension, fear, and hostility drained from her.

"Th-thank you, Junko!"

Ikusaba's face brightened, not a hint of suspicion in her look. She immediately turned to the refrigerator, not even worried about the fact that her back was turned to Monobear, and opened the door.

We prepared fresh blood packs on the day before we put this plan into action. These will last twenty-one days. They're still good.

Having used all the knowledge she obtained during her time in Fenrir, Ikusaba allowed a small hint of triumph shine through her expressionless face as she lifted up the blood pack.

But Monobear, who was by default without expression, looked slightly down. If a third party--especially a student who had dealt with Monobear--could see him now, they would wonder, "Is Monobear... surprised?" as though they had seen him for the first time.

Monobear immediately cleared his expression and whispered.

"...There should be a limit to how disappointing people can be, you know that?"

His whisper was quieter than the buzzing of a mosquito. Not even Ikusaba's trained ears could hear him.

Monobear shook his head and allowed his voice to flow from the speakers at its normal volume.

"...To be honest, I don't really care if a Super High School Level Despair like you has hope in anything. I never expected anything from you to begin with, and it's also going to help me despair even more."

"?"

"But I am disappointed. Just to let you know, 'disappointment' and 'despair' are two different things. Just like bears and pandas, you know?"

"Wha... Huh?!"

Ikusaba turned at Monobear's voice, flinching at the tone and breaking into shivers. His tone had not changed in the least, and the voice changer had not been turned off to reveal Junko's own. Yet Ikusaba was terrified at the voice. She was trembling on instinct--not as a soldier, but half as a member of Super High School Level Despair--and half as the twin sister of Junko Enoshima.

She could hear Junko's annoyance even through Monobear.

"Junko? What's wrong? Are... are you angry with me? I-is it because I'm not listening to what you tell me to do? Or... is it because I didn't die like you wanted me to earlier?"

"Angry isn't the half of it! I am really, completely mad at you! You're so boring! I'm so mad I'm falling asleep!"

Although there was nothing to differentiate Monobear's current state of anger from what way he normally showed rage to his students, Ikusaba could instinctively sense something mixed in with her sister's annoyance.

It was despair-inducing disappointment.

To most people, despair constituted the loss of hope. But things were different for them, members of Super High School Level Despair. To them, to be disappointed was to lose despair.

Ikusaba herself was a member of this group. She dirtied her own hands because her sister asked, and for the purpose of bringing despair to the world. However, despite her insistence that she was a true member of Super High School Level Despair, there was a clear inherent difference between them.

Junko Enoshima was a god of Despair itself. She was born in despair, spreading it to the hopes of others and letting them rot from the inside out, dyeing them into her own colour. For Junko, the act of having hope was despair in and of itself. The act of accomplishing despair was to 'successfully accomplish the hope of despair', making it at once joy and excruciating pain. Junko had proudly walked this abyss of contradictions all her life. The abyss would one day swallow the world and tear it in two.

Mukuro Ikusaba, meanwhile, had neither hope for the world nor despair at it. At least, not while she was a member of Fenrir. She had only come to believe that she was among those who brought despair because she grew up with Junko. She had nothing against the world, and only followed her sister because she believed this was her mission.

It was only recently that she began to question her mindset. Hearing about this plan from Junko and watching the world burn at the hands of people in Monobear masks did nothing to sway her, but when she heard that Junko was intending to plunge Naegi and the others into a game of murder, something within her began to move.

The seed of doubt soon took root, sprouting into a thorny vine that twisted around her feet. And the moment she met her friends for the first time under the identity of Junko Enoshima and realized their memories were truly

gone, the vines quickly tightened around her ankles.

They're gone.

Junko is the only one who knows about me now. But that's all.

This shouldn't be a problem. This is how it was before.

Nothing is going to be the same again. This is how things should be.

I think... this is fine.

She had lost the past two years spent with her friends, and would now betray them into death and despair. Ikusaba's heart could not be moved by the burden of these crimes, but the question of 'why does my heart ache?' tugged at her. Perhaps this was why she had spoken to Naegi as she did earlier in the infirmary. And when Naegi revealed to her one particular answer, something in her changed.

"If I ever decide to kill someone, I'll make sure it isn't you!"

Although she had been playing the part of her sister at the time, this honest sentiment belonged to Ikusaba herself. She initially was thinking of asking Junko if there was any way to spare Naegi from the game. But things had come to this before she could get the chance.

In the past two years, Ikusaba had gained an interest in the world beyond her sister. And in that world, Makoto Naegi--the first person who smiled at her and bridged the gap between her and the world--had become like a sapling of sincerity taking root in her heart.

By the time Ikusaba realized this, the tree had already rotted from the inside. But as she struggled with the reality before her, Monobear sighed at her.

"What about you is anything like a wolf, anyway? You're just a dog who does anything Junko Enoshima tells you to do. So is that what your tattoo means? That you're just some bitch who's loyal to Master Junko Enoshima? I bet Fukawa would say that. I guarantee it."

"...?"

Ikusaba stood in confusion. Monobear continued.

"Did you honestly think I was being serious when I told you Naegi was a type B??"

"What?! J-Junko, you lied to me?"

"Anyone else would've suspected something, but even I never thought you'd just go ahead and believe me! This was totally unexpected! Not even my ability to calculate the future could've predicted this.What a shock. I almost want to cry my eyes out and go looking for a robot cat that'll solve all my problems!"

"D-don't worry, Junko. Things aren't going as we planned, but I promise I'm still on your side. ...Is everything all right? If you're not feeling well, I could help-"

"Snap!"

The sound came from Monobear's mouth.

"That was the sound of my patience breaking. C'mon onto the roof... I haven't been this angry in forever! I'll break all your baby teeth!"

Monobear began mimicking boxing poses. Ikusaba was rooted to the spot, holding the blood pack. Confusion was clearly written on her face, as Monobear lifted his arms into the air in frustration.

"I can't bear how even I can't predict how much you'll disappoint me!"

With a threatening roar, he raised his claws into the air and charged at Ikusaba.

"!"

In an instant, all emotion drained from her face. It was not logic working in her, but the defensive instincts she had carved into the fibre of her being during her time in Fenrir. For a single moment, she set aside all sentiment from her mind and retaliated against the attack.

She took up a meal rod used to keep blood packs steady during transfusions, parrying Monobear's claws. However, Monobear's claws seemed to be made of an extremely strong alloy, diagonally slicing off the end of the metal rod.

But for some reason, Monobear did not attempt a follow-up attack. Instead, he spoke to Ikusaba.

"You're not a total disappointment when you're fighting, you know. But then again, I guess it would've been fun in its own way if you couldn't even deflect that. Right now, you're just lackluster in every way possible!"

"I-I'm sorry. I wasn't even thinking... Besides, I'm the only one who can understand you, Junko. Right?"

Ikusaba's words gave way to endless disappointment. The mask of ice she wore around others was entirely unlike the face she showed her sister, making it almost seem as though she had multiple personalities. But Monobear said nothing about her attitude. He was barely moving, looking as if he had been shut down. But Ikusaba poured out her heart to him.

"I can't just leave you alone, Junko..."

Monobear maintained his silence for a time. Then, a monitor in the infirmary came to life, displaying the face of the real Junko Enoshima. At the same time, the speakers began to play a voice that was completely different from that of Monobear.

"Say, sis?"

"Oh! Junko, it's you!"

Ikusaba's eyes brightened at the first sight of her sister in days, but they would soon go dim.

"You know, I was always thankful to you, sis. I mean it."

It was because Junko's voice, coming from the speakers, was terribly soft and gentle.

"...Junko?"

"I'm really sorry. I was being too harsh with you. I even tried to kill you just now, and I was about to make you do something horrible. Even though I know how you feel about Naegi."

"I-I don't..."

"Don't force yourself. You might not realize it, but it was really obvious. You never cared about those class pictures, but you looked at the camera properly that one time Naegi took the photo."

From just the image on the monitor, the Super High School Level Despair looked like a girl with a sweet, innocent smile teasing her older sister. But that was exactly why Ikusaba was slowly falling towards despairing fear.

"I always thought you should've put your all into it when you were in a picture with Naegi, but I guess that's all part of your disappointing self, sis."

"..."

"But you know, you might be lackluster and disappointing, but I love that about you too."

Ikusaba trembled.

"I love you."

How long had she wanted to hear these words from Junko?

Ikusaba believed that, no matter what Junko said, she actually loved her very much.

Ikusaba believed that she alone could understand the despair known as Junko Enoshima.

It was a ludicrous notion.

The moment Junko said, 'I love you', Ikusaba realized--to her agony--that she never truly understood her sister. Only now had she come to realize Junko's feelings.

Junko was being kind. There was no lie in her gentle words. Perhaps she was being entirely truthful about loving her sister as well. This was precisely why this signalled the destruction of their relationship. Ikusaba realized that Junko was cutting ties with her.

And before Ikusaba could say a word in reply, the girl on the monitor left her with a word of cruelty.

"I know you'll make your dreams come true someday."

It was the kind of comment that members of Super High School Level Despair would never make to one another. It drove into Ikusaba's heart the fact that she was no longer necessary to Junko Enoshima.

Her own sister had broken off ties with her, leaving Ikusaba's past dozen years of service as a member of Super High School Despair a waste.

But Ikusaba did not care about the time she lost with Junko. That no longer mattered to her--it was the fact of being rejected by her own sister that was throwing her into the abyss of despair.

This was why Ikusaba held hope.

She hoped that, perhaps her sister on the screen would say something like "Not! You seriously thought I'd say something that sappy? Jeez, you're annoying! Can't you just disappear forever or something?". She hoped that Junko might criticize her and call her useless. Ikusaba was no masochist, but she would have preferred to hear scornful laughter and be shot at rather than continue to endure this pain.

But--

"I love you, sis. Bye-bye."

The monitor speakers went dark, leaving Ikusaba with the worst goodbye she could have received. And as if on cue, Monobear got up again.

"The bonds of blood are wonderful, don't you agree? Di you know half of all murders are committed by family members?" He said, his tone no different than normal.

It was not clear if Ikusaba was listening to him. But she tightened her grip on the metal rod and tossed the blood pack onto the floor.

"I'm sorry.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

"Junko. I'm so sorry...

"I'm sorry..."

She mumbled to herself as though reciting a spell. Ikusaba did not reach for the blood pack on the floor, instead approaching Naegi's bedside with the rod in hand.

"I'll... I'll do it properly. I won't mess up. So please..."

"Oh? What are you going to do properly to Naegi with that thick rod? A little XXX? Or are you gonna finish him off? Either way, I'm in for a high!"

Ikusaba looked to be little more than broken at this point. Monobear approached her giddily.

His body was silently lifted into the air.

"Huh?"

There was no expression on his face as he attempted to see what had just happened to him. And in the blink of an eye, he was impaled by a metal rod. The end of the rod, which he had earlier sliced diagonally into a sharp point, tore straight through Monobear and jammed into the security camera through its lens. It broke down with a crackle.

One end of the rod was in the security camera, and from the other hung Monobear. He moved his mouth as if to say something, but only static escaped his speakers. And several seconds later, his functions ceased completely.

Ikusaba had silently kicked Monobear into the air. And the moment his power source, the bomb circuit, and the infirmary's security camera came into alignment at one point in the air, she had skewered them all with the metal rod.

With her powerful grip, she had utilized a technique that went beyond normal--surpassing even the Super High School Level and reaching superhuman heights. Ikusaba no longer held a shred of hesitation within herself. Her eyes glinted like a predator stalking its prey in the darkness.

There was a sharpness to the air around Ikusaba, lending her an even more dangerous look than when she was facing off against Oogami. She did not even spare Monobear a glance as she looked upon Naegi, who was breathing weakly. She remembered the words Junko used to destroy their bond of blood.

"So this is despair." She breathed, whispering to herself. "I'm sorry, Junko. Until now, I never understood what it really was."

Plainly and monotonous, like a robot.

"But now, I understand. It's all right now."

She was pushing back her fire with a mask of stoicism.

"That's why... I'll take responsibility. I'll make you happy, Junko. I'll make you despair. I'll save Naegi-kun... I'll make sure none of our friends die. I'll get them all out of here. And I'll kill every last one of the ones on the outside. You planned this for years and killed so many people to make this work... so I'll destroy every last trace of it."

She was not driven by resentment at the sister who abandoned her. Ikusaba would do all this for her sister's sake.

Stuck between Super High School Level Despair and the hope granted to her by Makoto Naegi, she was being refined into something unlike either.

Ikusaba would move forward, not knowing if the path before her would lead to hope or despair.

Over ten minutes passed.

The sound of footsteps echoed from the direction of the gymnasium and crowded before the infirmary.

Genocider Syo had avoided Oogami's attacks to the best of her abilities, but Togami's scathing "That's more than enough, you infuriating sicko." led her to stop in her tracks.

"Oh~? Hearing that from my handsome bespectacled Bya-kun makes my thirteenth alphabet all excited! They say the line between sadism and masochism is thinner than a sheet of paper, but my walls are made of cardboard! You can't explain these waves of passion with a piece of compressed pulp!"

As Syo rambled nonsensically about Togami, Oogami subdued her. She was then tied up with a microphone cable from the gymnasium and locked up in her room. Half the students had stayed behind to keep watch over her, while the other half had gone together to search through the school building.

"..."

When the infirmary doors opened, Kirigiri was faced with a nonfunctioning Monobear with a hole through his chest and the remains of a security camera.

The carnage was not only limited to the infirmary. The students had already seen multiple destroyed cameras on their way here, as well as scattered Monobear parts.

Rule #5: "No violence is permitted against the school's headmaster, Monobear. Destruction of the surveillance cameras is forbidden." had been broken to bits, but if Ikusaba was on the side of the original Monobear, she would have no need to stick to this rule. Although the Monobear in the gymnasium had stopped moving and they had lost contact with the so-called hacker, the students believed that the hacker had engaged Ikusaba in battle with a different unit.

With this hypothesis in mind, Kirigiri turned back to the infirmary. The beds were empty, but she could see from the blood that someone had been lying on one of them very recently.

"Tch. They got away..." Oowada spat, turning around. But Kirigiri did not follow him.

"...Fujisaki-san and I will stay here and search for clues."

"Huh? What do you mean?" Fujisaki asked, eyes wide, but Kirigiri continued coldly.

"We might find something if we search Monobear's remains. I've determined that you would be the most suitable candidate for working with machinery like this."

"But will it not be dangerous?" Oogami asked. Naturally, she had joined the investigation group because she was the only one who could subdue Ikusaba.

Kirigiri shook her head.

"It's unfortunate, but Fujisaki and I will only be a burden to you should you get into a difficult situation. So I think it will be better that we stay here and search for clues, rather than potentially become a hindrance. We might even be able to find a way to communicate wirelessly with the outside world through this Monobear unit."

"Of course. That is most reasonable. Then the rest of us shall search this floor. Should anything happen, call out to us immediately."

Oogami and the others left the infirmary.

"How could she possibly have done this kind of damage?" Fujisaki wondered, tentatively looking over Monobear's remains. Kirigiri, meanwhile, stood by one of the beds and focused her senses. A moment later, she confirmed a certain hypothesis she had formed. And with a quiet sigh, she spoke up, still standing straight.

"Let me apologize to you ahead of time, Fujisaki-san."

"Huh?"

"I've ended up dragging you into this gamble. So on the off-chance that something should happen, I want you to run out into the hallway and call for help immediately."

"Wh-what do you mean?"

But instead of replying, Kirigiri addressed one of the empty beds.

"I'll say this: I'm ready to hear you out. No matter how outlandish your story may be, I promise I won't pass judgement on it until you've told me everything you want to say."

"?"

Fujisaki was lost.

The Super High School Level mystery closed her eyes and made a request of the Super High School Level Programmer.

"Fujisaki-san. Does your laptop have a microphone and a voice recording function?"

"Huh? Oh, yes."

"Then I want you to record everything that we'll hear from this point on."

"...?"

What does she mean, 'everything we'll hear'? There's no one here... Fujisaki wondered, but began work on connecting Monobear's parts to the laptop while turning on the recording function.

"We'll pick up every sound in this room now..." Fujisaki said nervously. Kirigiri nodded, satisfied. She again addressed the empty bed.

"So, what would you have done if I'd told everyone that I'd found Naegi-kun?"

Fujisaki turned around without thinking. Having been crouching in order to get a good look at the nonfunctioning Monobear, it was easy to see what Kirigiri had been referring to.

One of the beds in the infirmary was located in a blind spot from the doors. And underneath that bed was Naegi, laid out helplessly on the floor. A blood pack was hidden beside the bed, slowly but surely providing him with a transfusion.

However, the contents of the blood pack was clear. It was likely only providing Naegi with saline for emergency hydration. It would not be as effective as a blood transfusion, but it would help prevent him from going into shock. Although Fujisaki did not have any medical knowledge beyond this, the biggest surprise was the fact that Naegi had been in the infirmary all along.

Not only that, the fact that Kirigiri had not been addressing the bed that Naegi was hidden under, but another bed under which no one was visible, terrified Fujisaki.

"Once the others were distracted by Naegi-kun, I would have taken someone else hostage." Said a voice from that very bed.

Only from a vantage point near the floor by the bed was it possible to confirm the identity of the voice. Surprisingly, the figure hiding there had been clinging to the underside of the frame. The way she held herself up was reminiscent of a ninja. A cursory glance under it would not have given away her location at all. And no matter the structure of the bedframe, it was easy to tell that someone who could endure such a long time in such a position must have possessed great physical strength. It was undoubtedly Mukuro Ikusaba, the Super High School Level Soldier.

"But you pretended not to notice. Why?" Ikusaba asked, cold as ice. Kirigiri replied without even blinking.

"Because I wanted to hear what you had to say for yourself, while you were calm."

"..."

"I knew you were under that bed the moment I stepped into this room. It's slightly tilted to the side compared to the others."

Fujisaki quickly tried to see if this was true, but there did not seem to be a visible difference between the beds. Only Kirigiri's honed observation skills could distinguish between such subtle differences.

Ikusaba seemed to have come to the same conclusion. She silently emerged from under the bed, ending her questioning of Kirigiri. There was a mask of ice over her face--to Fujisaki, she was even more terrifying than the bomb inside the deactivated Monobear. However, Ikusaba immediately turned to Kirigiri. She leaned against the wall and let her arms go limp as she threw out another question.

"Why... did you want to listen to what I had to say?"

It was a simple question, but Kirigiri thought for a moment. She answered the question as though she was still searching through herself.

"...If I had to say, it's because I want to remain neutral."

Kirigiri closed her eyes and pulled out her trump card--the inconsistency concerning her own body.

"Most of my memories are gone right now. I have no idea who I am, or what talents brought me to Hope's Peak Academy."

She could hear Fujisaki gasp from behind her, but Kirigiri continued.

"Even so, something tells me that I have to listen to what you have to say without passing judgement. Whether you're good or evil, I must understand the facts in order to find the truth. I have to come to that conclusion based on the information I gather through my own eyes and ears. I think that's the method that's been trained into me."

"...That's right. You were always like that, Kirigiri."

"And before I listen to what you have to say, there's one thing I want you to tell me."

"...What is it?"

There was no trace of emotion in Ikusaba's reply. Kirigiri formed her question and asked as though she were speaking to herself as well.

"What talent brought me to this school?"

The answer came all too simply.

"Kirigiri... you're a Super High School Level Detective."

It was a reply that would become a turning point for both girls.

"...Thank you. Everything's falling into place now."

Kirigiri slowly raised her head and introduced her hypothesis.

"If my memory loss isn't just a coincidence, then you... no, your organization has the power to erase memories. And under that supposition, we can take into account the events that took place in the gymnasium and come to a certain conclusion."

"...That is?"

"That what you said to Togami-kun as he made to abandon Fukawa-san... Your claim that they'd known one another for two years may, in fact, be true."

The fact that Naegi had called Ikusaba's name.

Ikusaba's concessions and denials.

Genocider Syo's claims.

The irregularities that Kirigiri's powerful observation skills perceived were coming together to draw her to an answer.

"There is a chance that Togami-kun and Fukawa-san's memories have been erased, much like my own. But I can't see them being under the exact same conditions as me. But if we assume that the mastermind has some control over the range of memories to eliminate, the idea that Monobear appeared to us on the day of the entrance ceremony is no longer a certainty. We may have indeed known Touko Fukawa for the past two years."

"Wh-what are you saying, Kirigiri-san?" Fujisaki cried, continuing to work on Monobear and the laptop. Kirigiri addressed both her fellow students as she continued.

"I had though that we were drugged and put to sleep the moment we set foot in this school. But there's a chance that all of that was a fabrication. For example, we may have already spent the past two years attending Hope's Peak, but our memories of that time were taken away. Another possibility is that we were never Super High School Level Students to begin with--just anonymous Jane and John Does who've been implanted with sixteen years' worth of false memories."

Kirigiri's claim sounded outlandish, but there was not a hint of humour in her eyes. She looked back up at Ikusaba and addressed her.

"In other words, in my mind, I am turning over the possibility that your strange story may in fact be true."

Kirigiri's plain statement left the infirmary in silence. But she did not allow herself to be crushed by the atmosphere--instead, she cut through the air with her words.

"Unless I have information, I can't do much more than come up with hypotheses. That's why I want to listen to what you have to say, Mukuro Ikusaba. I have no intention of taking your or that so-called hacker's words at face value."

She paused, closing her eyes and setting determination into her next words.

"But I want to come to as objective a judgement as possible. Of course, this is only possible if you can trust me and tell me the truth."

Kirigiri's voice made clear the determination and belief behind her words.

Ikusaba narrowed her eyes slightly, and turned to Kirigiri with a mix of emotions flashing through her eyes. Yet her expression and tone did not waver in the slightest.

"That's right... You were always like this, Kirigiri..."

Repeating what she had just said half to herself, Ikusaba spoke to Kirigiri directly.

"This is exactly why Junko took care to erase more of your memories."

"..."

"It's all right. I'll tell you everything."

And once she had laid Naegi onto the bed proper, Ikusaba mechanically began her explanation.

She described the life of a girl who relished the act of unleashing despair upon the world and herself.

The plan for despair that had been set in motion two years ago--or perhaps even earlier.

The fact that the world was currently ruled by despair itself.

Ikusaba condensed everything she knew into as simple an explanation as possible.

This was why it came across as even more outlandish than Kirigiri could have ever expected. And in that story, Ikusaba revealed the truth about the young detective.

Who Kirigiri was, and why she was at this school.

And even the final moments of the real headmaster--Kirigiri's father.

"..."

Kyouko Kirigiri did not once speak up in confusion during the explanation. Her face went blank when Ikusaba brought up the headmaster, but perhaps her memory loss and the strangeness of the situation had dulled the shock of losing her father. Even still, Ikusaba did not expect Kirigiri to trust her yet.

After hearing the story, Kirigiri remained silent for a time. Her unusual mental fortitude had allowed her to listen without denying Ikusaba's story and calling it madness or turning away in rejection.

"You don't have to believe me. After all, all of the pictures that can prove my story are with Junko. Telling you this is the best I can do."

With that, Ikusaba silently stepped over to the infirmary doors. And just before she left, she continued speaking without looking back.

"But even if you don't believe me... Kirigiri, Fujisaki... Thank you for listening to me until the end."

With an unusual tone for an apology, she turned around once more to look at Naegi, who was breathing weakly on the bed.

"...Try not to move Naegi-kun. And once he wakes up, give him a few drops of energy drink from the kitchen or the storage room."

"That's fine, but what are you planning to do, Ikusaba-san?" Kirigiri asked. Ikusaba stood up a little straighter.

"Despair..."

"?"

"I... have to show Junko despair."

Ikusaba opened the door, mumbling as if meaning for only herself to hear.

"After all, that's all I can do."

"No, there's something else."

"?"

Ikusaba stopped. Kirigiri spoke up.

"As long as you're engaged in combat against Monobear, he won't be able to touch Naegi-kun, whether he's Junko Enoshima or Besshiki Madarai."

"..."

"I can't trust you completely, but I can sympathize with the fact that you want to save Naegi-kun. Not like

Besshiki Madarai, who gave up on him immediately. Right?"

"...I'm sorry. I... I don't know much about sympathy, or anything..."

Ikusaba looked away, then bowed slightly as she stepped out of the infirmary.

"But, I... um... I'll do my best."

The doors closed. Ikusaba was gone.

"...I'm sorry for getting you involved, Fujisaki-san."

As Kirigiri went about mentally organizing the massive amounts of information Ikusaba provided her with, she turned to the pale and trembling Fujisaki, who was still at work on Monobear.

"S-say, Kirigiri-san... About what Ikusaba-san said just now..."

"We still have no idea if any of what she said is true. There's no need to worry unnecessarily." Kirigiri said comfortingly.

However, Fujisaki looked away and turned to the laptop.

"I... I think she's telling the truth."

"...? Do you have a particular reason?"

"Um, well... I'm pretty sure someone's controlling Monobear from the outside, but..."

The Super High School Level Programmer had connected part of Monobear's system to a computer, analyzing the contents of its control system. But Fujisaki had noticed something unusual about it.

"About this control program... I thought it would be another year before it could go online. But... this system is fully operational."

The rest of Fujisaki's voice was overwhelmed by trembling.

"You don't know that for sure. There's a chance that someone else was covertly developing the same program at the same time..." Kirigiri said, attempting to avoid making hasty conclusions by proposing another possibility.

But Fujisaki denied the possibility with a shake of the head.

"Um... that's not it. Well... it just looked really familiar..."

Kirigiri turned to her trembling classmate, shocked.

"Fujisaki-san! Then this program..."

"..."

"Don't tell me... you created this program?"

The Super High School Level Programmer could do little but nod.

Dangan Ronpa IF

In front of the first floor gates

Mukuro Ikusaba made her way forward, luckily managing to avoid Oogami and Oowada. She proceeded uninterrupted to the second largest space in the school after the gymnasium--the entrance hall with the sealed gates.

And as soon as she arrived, Monobear popped out from the shadows and stood in her way, his silhouette entirely out of place in the hall resembling a nuclear bunker, heavy artillery and all. He twisted his balloon-like body, snickering condescendingly.

"Upupupu... I wonder what kind of fun you were having in the infirmary? Did you take care of your rival in love, or did you wish them a happy marriage? Either way, don't you think our nice guy Naegi standing side-by-side with Kirigiri makes for a wonderful picture? If this were a thriller, they'd be the last surviving couple!"

"..."

"Well, I guess they'd still die at the end, though! The serial killer turns out to have been alive after all! Splat! Goes their blood! Plop! Goes their skin! I'm a huge fan of bait-and-switch you-thought-you-were-alive-but-DEATH!-ending-nations. ...Wait, where'd 'nation' come from?!" Monobear complained angrily, but Ikusaba was not shaken. She glared at him, cold and sharp as a shard of ice, as though waiting for him to continue.

"Upupupu... That aside, I'm so unbearably sad... Our peaceful school life is being overturned by a delinquent rule-breaking teenager. Say goodbye to your failure of a headmaster here. I'm going to Monobear-Evolve into a Big Magnum Headmaster and bring you back to the straight and narrow, young lady!"

As soon as he finished speaking, Monobear drew his steel claws and pitter-pattered towards Ikusaba.

"And if I want to bring you back, then that must mean I have to kill you first!"

Just before he ended his sentence. Monobear sped up in the blink of an eye and charged at Ikusaba like a missile. She had no trouble dodging this attack, but Ikusaba put slightly more distance between herself and Monobear in case his claws could be extended.

But yet another figure appeared beside her.

"!"

Ikusaba twisted her body to the limit as she evaded the newcomer's attack by a hair's breadth. When she landed on the floor again a moment later, she was greeted by a surreal scene.

("Upupupupu... So, what does our immortal killing machine want? Are you gonna tell the others the truth and escape this school? Even though you know what's waiting outside?")

Two Monobear units were saying the same thing to her at the same time.

("You know, I don't really care if you do. I bet it'll be amazing and exciting to see their faces once their relief at surviving turns to despair at reality! They'll be scrambling to come back inside!") The two Monobears said in stereo sound. ("You said you'd destroy my plans, but there's no way you can reach the good ending. You're one of the people who sealed off that route in the first place!")

"..."

("You know there's no way they're gonna thank you, right? You can all step out together, but you won't be able to act so high-and-mighty once they start breathing in that polluted air. Forget forgiveness, some of them might get angry and try to come back inside, and some of them might blame you for telling them the awful truth! But

then again, you are to blame for everything. Sowwy, Monobear's made a widdle mistake!")

Even though Ikusaba was facing down two difficult opponents, her mask did not crack. She had understood that Junko Enoshima could control two Monobear units at once with ease.

Taking out an arm-length metal pipe from seemingly nowhere, she took a fighting stance. It was the rod that had once been intended for blood transfusion purposes, reshaped into a sharp weapon.

"That's all right. I... I'm used to it."

None of the fear she showed when Monobear claimed "Naegi might get mad at you" showed on her expression. Having truly cast it all aside, Ikusaba plainly made her demands of Monobear.

"Open the gates, Junko."

("...")

The Monobears stood in silence for a moment at the surprisingly straightforward request. They then replied,

("What? Why?")

"That way, we can all leave together."

It was yet another forthright answer. The two Monobears posed themselves as though they were whispering to each other. Knowing the action was intended to insult her, Ikusaba continued to speak to Junko, who was controlling the bears.

"I believe. I believe they'll all understand once I show them the outside world. And then, they won't suspect Naegi-kun anymore."

("Say, Miss Disappointing Sister? Do you not get why we have an air filtration system in this school?")

"The air outside is unhealthy, but it's not immediately lethal... Probably. It's still miles better than living in this school, killing each other one after another... I think."

("How can you be so sure of that? You know what I'm talking about, right? Before the former headmaster got tossed into outer space and turned into a Star Child, everyone had a one-on-one interview with him and agreed to stay in the school. Are you sure you wanna betray their wishes?")

Ikusaba blinked, slowly putting one foot forward.

"I... don't really care about how they feel."

("What?")

"Junko, you're all I have. So don't worry, little sis. I'm always looking at you, so... I swear I'm going to make you despair. I swear I'll make Naegi-kun and everyone else happy. So when you find joy in that despair, I'll trust in Naegi-kun's hope and bring my eyes back to you." Ikusaba said, hesitant but firm. The Monobears looked at one another again and began speaking to each other.

"My goodness, this won't do at all, Monobear A. Does this girl not understand her own hypocrisy?"

"Her disappointing side's gone all sparkly and explodey, Monobear B."

The two bears turned around towards Ikusaba, who was ready to destroy them. And they spoke up at once--

("What do you think, Monobear C?")

"...?"

Their question confused Ikusaba for a moment, but her instincts alerted her to dodge to the side. A third Monobear, steel claws raised, passed by where her head had been only a moment ago. The new unit landed with a spectacular spin. He turned to Ikusaba, who was holding herself against the ceiling with the remains of a surveillance camera in her arms.

"Just the same as you, A and B."

The three Monobears stood in a row. It would be the kind of sight that was nothing short of a nightmare for the students locked in this school.

(("Of course! Upupupupupu!"))

The three units spoke together, all six eyes looking up at Ikusaba. A split second later, they leapt in three different directions and each kicked off one of the walls. Naturally, the mutual target of their triangular attack was Ikusaba, clinging to the ceiling.

Their claws flew towards her from different directions, as though in an attempt to corner her. But an assault of this caliber did not even constitute a bad cream for Ikusaba. Clinging to the ceiling with one arm, she expertly swung her feet and fists around like a twister. The Monobears fell to the floor with a crash.

Ikusaba did not lose this chance. She pursued them, landing on the floor and swinging her metal pipe. She suddenly halted, and took a step back. One of the Monobears exploded with a deafening blast. He had used the bomb inside of himself to try and take Ikusaba with him. But Ikusaba's honed instincts commanded her to avoid the explosion before she knew it was coming.

Ikusaba turned her attention to the hallway for a moment, wondering if the sound of the explosion could alert Oogami and the others to the battle, but she did not hear any footsteps coming in her direction. And from amidst the smoke, Monobear's voice taunted her.

("Oh, don't worry. I told the other students to gather in the cafeteria. All I had to say was that I disarmed the poison gas setup and that a special police team was on their way! I bet they're all huddled up together with Kirigiri and the others. Naegi, too!")

"!"

(("I doubt Oogami would hurt him, but I bet someone like Togami might go so far as to torture Naegi once he wakes up! Rubbing salt or soy sauce in his wound... Just thinking about it makes me all hot! Puhyahyahya!"))

Ikusaba tilted her head slightly at Monobear's overlapping voices.

"...They're going to find out you were lying about the police. Is that really okay?"

(((("It's no problem at all! Once I've taken care of you, they can find out everything's a lie, for all I care. Upupupu...")))

"...?"

((((("Don't you get it? How disappointing!"))))

Ikusaba finally noticed something--not the reason Monobear did not care about the other students learning the truth, but the fact that the number of overlapping Monobear voices was slowly increasing.

(((((((((("Upupupupu... Upupupupu..."))))))))))

The smoke began clearing. Three Monobears were standing before her. The one that had exploded could not have fixed itself, which meant that a new unit had come to take its place. But the number of voices Ikusaba could hear were clearly more numerous. And as though proving her sense of hearing accurate, the Monobears moved at once.

The three units bent forward simultaneously, spinning their upper bodies around. And from behind them emerged yet more Monobear units, like shadows come to life. The second row of Monobears mimicked their predecessors with a single frame of delay, revealing yet more Monobears behind them. Ultimately, Ikusaba counted approximately ten units in each of the three lines.

[Upupupu... Just to let you know, this move of mine is called a circle dance. Ever heard of it?]

Thirty Monobears flaunted their irrelevant knowledge all at once. Ikusaba had known that multiple Monobear units were present all over the school, but only Junko Enoshima had an idea of exactly how many of them were in existence. There was no telling how much of the total number these thirty units constituted.

The mass of monochrome spun round and round, making it look as though they were projecting a hypnotic image from three directions, but Ikusaba remained expressionless. In fact, the bizarre sight unfolding before her

compelled the Super High School Level Soldier to regain her focus. She was an entirely different person from the girl who had panicked at Naegi's injury in the gymnasium.

Breathing slowly, Ikusaba faced down the thirty units of despair and allowed her heart to race--it was not out of fear, but the instincts carved into her. Her cells sped up their functions as her heart began pumping blood rapidly through her entire body. Her senses grew sharp, as the Monobears began speaking to her again.

(((((((("Don't worry. I'm going to let Naegi live.")))))))))

"...?"

(((((((("After all, as long as they're all alive, I can reset their memories all I want!")))))))))

"...What?!"

(((((((("Upupupu... That's right. All of your efforts and hopes and dreams and determination are going down the toilet!")))))))))

The Monobears spoke ten at a time, alternating between sentences. It was as though the mastermind controlling them was flaunting her ability to puppet them as she desired.

But the Super High School Level Soldier understood the intention behind this action--her ears, strained to their limits, had picked up the sound of movement between the voices of the Monobears.

"..."

Ikusaba kicked off the floor, her mask never faltering. The moment she moved aside, a powerful noise shook the entrance hall as the firearms installed on the ceiling pumped out bullets like no tomorrow. The Monobears were just a distraction the mastermind was using in order to shoot Ikusaba down.

And as if to corner her further, the Monobears charged through the storm of bullets towards Ikusaba. Not a single unit was hit by bullets because Junko had programmed their movements in line with the guns in advance, Ikusaba guessed. She darted before the gates, evading claws and bullets every step of the way.

The act of calculating her dodges and programming the Monobears and guns to react accordingly was probably impossible for most people, but Ikusaba knew it to be possible for Junko. It was because Junko possessed despair-inducing talent, as Super High School Level Despair. She would surpass the limits of humanity in order to bring despair upon Ikusaba.

The scene unfolding before her eyes was despair itself. The half-adorable-half-terrifying Monobears danced before her like reapers, flanked by a storm of bullets. It was an ostentatiously despair-inducing sight, all created for Mukuro Ikusaba alone.

But Ikusaba was feeling almost surprisingly uplifted.

All of this... for me?

Junko is going so far, just for me.

Junko... are you looking at me?

In the end, perhaps Junko's nickname of 'Disappointment' was a perfect fit for Ikusaba. She tightened her fists.

"Thank you, Junko."

With a single whisper that was drowned out by the sound of gunfire, Ikusaba went completely silent. Thanks to her status as a member of Super High School Level Despair, her heart was filling with joy. And as if to offset the sudden surge of emotions, the sparkle in her eyes disappeared.

Silence surrounded her, and even the gunfire ceased for a moment. But this was only the impression held by the mastermind behind Monobear. Something powerful enough to silence the overpowering gunfire, which not even Monobear's sensors could measure, had rippled out through the school, with Mukuro Ikusaba as the centre.

I'm... going to do this properly.

With this final thought, even her emotions came to silence. The air froze around her as she bolted through the gaps between the bullets. And at the same time, her heart also froze over, transforming itself into a machine. It

took only several seconds for her body and mind to meld and become one with the air around them, covering the battleground with her temperature.

The entrance hall was a despair-inducing space where it rained bullets and Monobears were occupying every inch of the room. But Ikusaba predicted their every movement and leapt into the air without a hint of hesitation. A Monobear unit jumped up with its claws raised, already prepared for her jump, but she effortlessly dodged the attack, using the unit as a stepping stone and flying through the air.

Bullets flew at the place where she had been only a moment ago and struck the falling Monobear unit, internally installed explosive and all.

The force of the impact caused a chain reaction, sending another Monobear unit flying with sparks trailing from his body. Ikusaba used the force of the blast to balance herself in midair, kicking down two, three Monobears that leapt up at her. It was as though she were capable of flight.

In contrast to Ikusaba's expert movements, the Monobears elected to jump into the way of the bullets, exploding one after another in a rhythmical fashion. Several of them exploded by the gates, but the heavy door was not even scratched by the blasts.

Having taken control over the entire entrance hall, Ikusaba dodged the bullets and recognized the state of the door. There was no way to destroy it with just the bombs installed in the Monobear units.

But she did not stop. Ikusaba's intent was to find out how they could escape this school. She was not going to kill Junko Enoshima. She would merely grant her despair by bridging hope into the futures of Naegi and the others. And because this was her ultimate goal, she would stop at nothing to ask Junko how to leave.

But in contrast to her determination, Ikusaba's mouth remained shut. This did not mean, however, that she was not communicating with her sister. After all, this very situation--the tug-of-war of death and destruction was as good as a conversation for her.

Battle was all Mukuro Ikusaba knew. It was impossible for her to take an interest in--or even need--anything else, she believed. She would be happy to serve as the blade that would satisfy her sister's desire for despair. This was everything to Ikusaba, and all this time she had told herself she was incapable of anything else.

This was why this power was her language. A battle to the death was as good as a heartfelt speech for Ikusaba. She would fill the violence swirling through the battle with her hopes, facing down enemies who communicated in much the same fashion. It was the same way even when she faced her own sister. Ikusaba was powerless to retaliate in a battle of words against Junko Enoshima, always left to cower and apologize.

But things were different now. For what seemed to be the first time in their lives, Junko was communicating to her in the language of power. The God of Despair who had brought the world to its knees was speaking Ikusaba's language.

Joy lit up her heart, but this compelled her to focus even more on the 'conversation' at hand. Her face was the picture of stoicism, as she continued engaging her opponent on the ice-cold battlefield.

The school's own firearms spouted countless rounds (Dangan) of despair. But Ikusaba's words shot down (Ronpa) every last one of the terrible violence that threatened to eat away at her.

Ikusaba soon realized that the number of Monobears was not decreasing, no matter how many of them she took down. Not only that, more units joined them one by one, leaving her to face down nearly fifty Monobears alone.

But Ikusaba could not be shaken so easily. As she wielded her power without an end in sight, her heart was overflowing with something that was neither despair nor hope. Junko's abandonment taught her despair and Junko's violence taught her hope. For Mukuro Ikusaba, who was never interested in the world, perhaps this little space before the school gates was a perfect world--and a representation of her life itself.

And so this infinitely disappointing girl who knew no other way of life danced alone to a song of hope, moving to the rhythm of despair.

Dangan Ronpa IF

The heart of the Computer Room 1 Monobear's Chamber

How much time had passed? The surveillance cameras installed at the gates were capturing the image of countless Monobears being felled by a veritable demon. The Monobears were multiplying by the minute, now numbering at a hundred as they clamoured to get their claws on Ikusaba. Most of them were moving automatically, programmed to react to Ikusaba's actions based on prior information of her movements.

But despite the hundreds of mechanical enemies surrounding her, Ikusaba did not look the least bit afraid. Her movements, unhindered by injuries of any sort, was almost divine in sight. Although this also meant something about Sakura Oogami, who had been able to inflict an injury upon her arm, Ikusaba as she was now could potentially fight the Super High School Level Wrestler to a draw without the use of firearms.

Controlling the battleground in its entirety, it was as though Ikusaba had turned the entrance hall into a part of herself. She avoided attacks from behind as though she could see out the back of her head as she pierced through the Monobears' weak points with the metal pipe. She parried every attack as though her skin was covered in eyes. She had already gone beyond the Super High School Level, breaking the boundaries of humanity and ascending to the level of a machine of violence incarnate.

And despite understanding that incredible power in its entirety, Junko Enoshima--the mastermind--was not fazed. She did not even blink. There was nothing but despair inside her to begin with. In fact, the sight of Ikusaba trying to cause her despair almost endeared her to Junko. Junko despaired at the fact that she nearly fell prey to such thoughts, and relished in the emotion.

Junko understood full well that Mukuro Ikusaba was currently neither hope nor despair, but a simple phenomenon. She was but a disappointing girl who could not even understand her own emotions, turning to the only thing she could believe in--not force or strength, but violence. Ikusaba had turned into a humanoid disaster, like a storm--or perhaps an omnipresent force like gravity itself. She was a machine designed to bring despair to

Junko Enoshima.

For some time, the mastermind enjoyed watching her sister go all-out. Even if Ikusaba were to destroy everything before her and ruin her life, Junko would be satisfied by the despair. At least, she entertained this thought for a moment.

But her despair-inducing nature--her easily bored personality--reared its head. The smile she wore as she looked at the monitor vanished, replaced by a sudden look of calm. Junko reached for the microphone that connected directly to Monobear's speakers.

Ikusaba was no longer human.

Therefore, all Junko had to do was bring her back.

With that simple yet despair-inducing thought in mind, the mastermind whispered into the microphone.

"Sis?"

Dangan Ronpa IF

First floor gates

"Sis?"

The voice was calling to her.

Monobear's voice filter had been turned off. Junko Enoshima's voice was coming from one of the Monobear units, conveying her voice in its natural state to the entrance hall.

"...Ugh!"

That one word was enough.

With one magic word, the machine known as Mukuro Ikusaba regained her humanity.

Monobear was not one to miss this chance. As though moving to the beat of Ikusaba's faltering movements, countless steel claws leapt towards her. Ikusaba allowed her instincts to lead her, twisting her entire body as she faced off against the attacks.

She managed to stave off the assault while sustaining only a few cuts. But the despair was not yet at an end.
The Super High School Level Despair moved on to her next plan, not giving her older sister time to recover.

[Ikusaba-san! Look out!]

"...What?"

The moment she heard that voice, Ikusaba's mind went blank.

It was Makoto Naegi's voice--the cry that rescued her from Gungnir and changed her destiny.

No.

It took her a tenth of a second for her to deduce that Junko had merely replayed the sound clip from the surveillance camera that captured the scene. But that short amount of time was enough to drag the now-human Ikusaba into despair. Just as she recovered from her moment of shock, one of the Monobear units leapt up from behind her and landed a roundhouse kick on her temple.

Ikusaba reacted instantly, putting up a hand to dull the impact, but another Monobear flew in from the opposite side with a headbutt. And as soon as Ikusaba dodged that strike, she was hit by three simultaneous drop kicks from three units that were behind her and was thrown to the floor.

"...Ugh..."

The fact that they were not using their claws meant that Junko was not planning to kill her immediately. And before Ikusaba could get up to take a fighting stance, the dozens of Monobears that waited for her on the floor clambered atop her, holding down each of her joints. Ikusaba helplessly lay face-down against the floor, as one of the Monobears walked up to her.

"Upupupupu... Isn't this exciting? I have a cute teenaged girl at the mercy of countless 'Me's!"

"..."

"Don't give me that look. If I wanted to kill you, I could just go crazy with those guns up there. But our adoring audience watching us on TV wouldn't stand for that. We're going to have to try this one more time."

"What... are you going to do to me...?" Ikusaba asked blankly. Monobear chortled.

"Nothing, really. I'm just going to let you take part in the School Life of Mutual Killing like you did before! I'll erase everyone's memories, and have them start off with introductions and the Entrance Ceremony all over again!"

Remaining in character as himself, Monobear leaned in towards Ikusaba's face.

"But we can't just keep things stale and re-do everything. This time, you're going to participate as Mukuro Ikusaba!"

"...?"

"I'll erase huge chunks of your memories like I did to that annoying detective. You'll be some poor girl who's lost her memories!" Monobear said, twisting his body. Behind him were the idle Monobear units, all twirling around in place to create a scene straight out of a fantasy. Monobear revealed his plan to Ikusaba.

"At first, you'll be the girl with memory loss--some poor unfortunate victim that everyone cares about. But as they delve deeper into the mysteries behind this school, they'll slowly find out more and more about you. And I can't wait to see how they're going to turn on you, just like that! Then maybe you'll react without thinking and I might end up having to change the rules about justifiable self-defence! Upupupu..."

"No... you can't!"

Her memories would be erased. Although she could do little about her classmates' resentment, the prospect of losing even her childhood memories--the prospect of losing her connection to Junko--was unbearable, in spite of Ikusaba's disinterest in the world.

"I've heard of things like New Game Plus, but I bet this is the first time I'll get to see a New Game Minus! Aaaah~ I guess you could call this a handicap run? Or should I just make it even more masochistic? Forget Hard Mode, Very Hard, or Hellfire! Lets go all the way up to Impossible Mode!"

"...?"

"For example, I could give you a breezy ride around the school with you hanging off the back of a motorcycle. Then you'll get bludgeoned by a million fungoes, followed by a light burning at the stake, then a feathery crushing with a forklift before I erase your memories!"

"...!"

Ikusaba had some idea of where these ideas were coming from. They were part of the tools they had prepared earlier for the students' executions.

"Everyone'll start with self-introductions and find you, a bandaged flat-chested girl with no memories and a Fenrir tattoo on her hand, walking through the halls! I bet there's freaks out there who'd go for that. If this were a game, we'd be quintupling our sales!"

Monobear was talking in a joking tone, but Ikusaba had no doubt he was entirely serious. Her ears were already picking up the sound of an engine roaring in the distance.

"Now, your chariot is on its way!"

From the distinctness of the sound, Ikusaba determined that it was the large-scale motorcycle that was supposed to be used for one of the executions.

"I'm bringing it from all the way in the punishment room, so you'd better be grateful!"

The roar of the engine drew near, like the footsteps of the reaper closing in on his prey. Ikusaba wondered how the tiny Monobear unit could possibly ride a vehicle that large, but she reminded herself that she was up against the Super High School Level Despair. Junko would not let logic get in the way of creating despair--the despair which was inextricably entwined with Ikusaba's life and fate.

Have I failed?

I couldn't make Junko despair?

I... couldn't save Naegi-kun and the others?

Her mind reached for conclusions in the form of questions. But she could not answer them yet--not so easily. After all, she was still alive. Though the rumbling of the engine approached ever closer--

"...?"

Suddenly, Monobear froze, though the dancing units behind him continued their automatic movements. And in this anomalous moment Ikusaba noticed something.

The sound of the motorcycle suddenly came to a stop. Then, following the brief moment of silence was a veritable explosion of noise, as the engine roared louder than could normally be possible and drew nearer at several times its prior speed. Seconds passed, and appearing before the gate was--

A gigantic motorcycle plowed through a group of Monobears like a hunter stalking its prey. And riding the motorcycle was Mondo Oowada.

"...?!"

"...What?!"

Ikusaba and Monobear were both taken by surprise by the turn of events. And instead of addressing them, Oowada elected to ride the hijacked motorcycle towards Ikusaba. A split second before the tires were close enough to crush her, he raised the back wheel and turned the entire motorcycle with the front wheel as its fulcrum. The backside of the motorcycle swept clear over Ikusaba's back, knocking away the Monobears that were holding her down.

"...Hey. Can you stand?" Oowada said, not entirely happy but holding out a hand to Ikusaba nonetheless.

"...?"

Ikusaba took his hand and got to her feet, still confused.

"What are you doing, Oowada?! I almost had her!" One of the Monobears said, not as himself but as the hacker Besshiki Madarai.

"Oi, you said you were Madarai or somethin', right?"

"Yes! So what are you doing with that terrorist?!"

"...Hey, I ain't bragging 'bout this, but I honestly don't have a fucking clue which one of you is lying." Oowada said, his face contorting. "But, see... I ain't the kind of punk who's gonna stand around an' watch a girl get hurt."

"What are you saying?! Calm down and think. This must be Stockholm Syndrome setting in! When a kidnapping victim begins to feel sympathy for the kidnappers-" Monobear began, trying to convince Oowada. But Oowada ignored him, took Ikusaba by the hand, and pulled her onto the back of the motorcycle.

"Damn, shut up! I dunno anything about Stomach Punch or Stone Cold or whatever, but don't go around thinkin' you can tell me what to do!" Oowada roared. The guns installed on the ceiling turned towards the motorcycle, but it sped away from the entrance hall faster than they could take aim. Countless Monobears leapt after them, their claws ripping through the air.

"...Why?" Ikusaba asked.

"Huh?!" Oowada shouted, his voice more than a match for the noise coming from the engine. "Don't get the wrong idea! I ain't doin' this 'cause I trust you!"

His tone then dropped considerably, almost to a whisper.

"Dunno why, but... for some reason, I felt like I could trust what he said."

"...Who?" Ikusaba asked, but Oowada did not have the chance to answer. The unit leading the charge of Monobears had almost caught up to the motorcycle. The bears brandished their claws, moving in unison as though they were the jaws of a great monster.

Not a moment too soon, the motorcycle zoomed past a certain girl--a grand warrior who positively radiated

fighting spirit. The strongest being on Earth.

"_____"

With an unearthly battle cry, the Super High School Wrestler kicked off the floor. The school was soon enveloped by a noise that dwarfed even the volume of the motorcycle's engine. When Ikusaba looked back, Sakura Oogami was landing on the floor, sending countless Monobears flying dozens of yards away.

"...Oogami?"

It was impossible to tell if Oogami had heard Ikusaba say her name. But she took a fighting stance, her breaths calm as she held back the Monobears like a great guardian deity.

"...I see nothing resembling the methods of a Super High School Level Hacker in your pursuit."

The aura emanating from her form filled the halls, the heat coming off her skin in a haze. It was a show of strength quite different from that of Ikusaba's--a power not of violence, but pure fighting spirit. In battle, Ikusaba froze the air around her, seemingly along with her perception of time itself. In contrast, Oogami distorted space itself with the heat of her aura. And this was the figure standing between the Monobears and the escaping motorcycle.

Feeling the heat on her back, Ikusaba turned to look ahead.

There she saw Yamada and Fujisaki, tentatively poking their heads out through the door leading into the dormitory building. Asahina and Ishimaru were also there, keeping watch with their feet firmly planted on the side of the school building. Once the motorcycle passed them by and arrived in front of the cafeteria, Oowada slowed down the motorcycle and turned in to a stop.

Around them were the other students, all of them warily looking at Ikusaba. But Ikusaba noticed two sets of eyes in particular that showed a different emotion. One set belonged to Kyouko Kirigiri, whose calm look never faltered. And the other belonged to the skinny boy Kirigiri was supporting on her shoulder.

"Naegi-kun...?" Ikusaba breathed, still seated on the back of the motorcycle.

Naegi defeated the immense pain that was eating away at his entire body as he mustered a smile for her and repeated what he had said earlier.

"I'm glad... you're not hurt... Ikusaba-san..."

Disappointingly enough, Mukuro Ikusaba could not achieve her hope of bringing despair to her sister. But instead, she succeeded in planting the seeds of hope in her fellow students.

With great difficulty, Makoto Naegi regained consciousness.

His course of action during Ikusaba's battle at the entrance hall against the Monobear army was exceedingly simple.

All he did was relate his own memories to the other students.

Even the recording from the infirmary that Fujisaki presented to everyone had not been enough to convince them. Naturally, at first they were not persuaded by Naegi's explanation. That is, until Oogami asked him a certain question and turned the atmosphere upside-down.

"Ah... Then you say that the world outside this school is in utter ruins? That no one remains alive?"

"...Don't worry, Oogami-san... I... I'm sure Kenichiro-san must be safe... He's not going to break his promise to you... I just know it..." Naegi said slowly, struggling to take breaths in between words.

Oogami gasped. Kenichiro was the name of the man she had never been able to defeat--a man with whom she had made a vow to fight once more, and one other promise.

"How... How do you know that name... and the fact of that promise?"

"You told me yourself, Oogami-san... No..." Naegi breathed. "Oogami-san... you told us all. Everyone..."

"..."

Oogami stood in silence for a moment before turning to her fellow students.

"I shall put my faith in Naegi."

"S-Sakura-chan?" Asahina gasped. Oogami continued, her tone somewhat hesitant.

"Not once have I ever spoken of this man and our promise. And I intended to keep this memory buried within my heart until my dying day. But if I had truly disclosed this secret of mine, then that must mean there was a powerful bond between myself, Naegi, and you, my fellow students."

Naegi continued to recount his memories in a gentle tone. Although it could not be the best thing for his health, he did not stop revealing even more memories that the others had lost.

"Naegi Makoto-dono! That story idea is still but a figment of my imagination! Could you possibly be asatori-type Emitter?!"

"You... already finished that book... I helped you with the inking and stuff..."

"Whoa, hold your horses! How'd you know I extorted money from that gangster's girl, Naegi?!"

"...Because... They lumped me in with you and almost sold off both our organs, Hagakure-kun..."

The pain of his injury was excruciating. But Naegi did his best to keep a smile on his face as he told everyone about the cherished memories they had made together. And as he continued, the others slowly began to realize that there was something very genuine about the memories he related to them--he told them the kind of things that couldn't be learned without having spent time with them.

The students began to catch sight of something like a lost connection between one another. Togami alone remained cynical ("There's a good chance all of you are working together. After all, there is no way I could have allowed myself to become close to the likes of you people"), but he at least seemed to have stopped thinking of Naegi as a simple terrorist.

Even if Mukuro Ikusaba did not intentionally set things up this way, the act of holding off the Monobears long enough for Naegi to awaken and recount his memories became a tiny ray of hope in her path.

And now, as she looked upon the face of the boy who flashed a smile at her well-being, Ikusaba found herself unable to speak. What should she say, she wondered, lost for words. The battle was over, and Ikusaba was back to being a disappointing teenage girl. She averted her eyes and apologetically stepped off the back of the

motorcycle. But Naegi did not ignore her.

"...Thank you... You saved me, Ikusaba-san..."

"...!"

Naegi gave her a word of honest thanks between his ragged breathing. Ikusaba was unable to meet his eyes, muttering as if to herself.

"...Why...?"

"Huh?"

"Kirigiri must have told you... You know what I did to you... what I did to everyone."

Ikusaba should rightly have been nothing but a traitor to the boy who had regained his memories. So how could he bring himself to smile at her? Ikusaba kept her gaze locked on the floor, unwilling to look up. Naegi laughed sheepishly.

"I guess you're right, but... You saved my life a few times in the past two years. And..." Naegi took a quiet breath and smiled again at Ikusaba. "We're friends... we spent all that time together. I'd be happy if you could find another path, not despair... And if I could help you somehow, I would..."

"I've come all this way... How could I take another path?"

"...I don't know what you should do, or what I can do, Ikusaba-san... But I don't think whether you find the answer matters as much as giving it a try."

Was Naegi saying this on purpose, or was it a coincidence? He had said something similar when he was talking with "Junko Enoshima" in the infirmary. It meant that whether his memories were intact or not, this was the true character of Makoto Naegi. As Ikusaba affirmed this fact to herself, Naegi made a kindly but almost foolishly stubborn proposal.

"And it's not just you, Ikusaba-san. From now on, even Enoshima-san--"

But he was quickly cut off.

[Upupupupu... Upupupupupupu...]

The monitors in the school blinked on all at once, displaying Monobear's face, and carrying his familiar laughter through the speakers.

[I guess I could have dragged on that whole Super High School Level Hacker act, but I'm sick of impersonating someone who might not even exist! At this rate, I'll lose my identity and turn into Fraud-o-Bear!] He cried angrily.

Kirigiri looked up at a surveillance camera.

"It certainly doesn't look like you're having a hard time keeping up."

[When it comes to giving up, I'm the fastest bear around! Anyway, I bet Little Fujisaki there must've figured out the secrets of my control program by now.]

"...So you really did place it there on purpose."

When Kirigiri heard Ikusaba's explanation about Junko Enoshima, she found herself realizing that there were two possible reasons that such a malicious human being would leave behind such an obvious clue inside the Monobear units. The first reason would be to lead the students to the conclusion that the world outside was already on the brink of ruin, and that the strangers they had been murdering had actually been their friends, turning their hopes into despair. The second reason was in anticipation of the control program providing the clue to the downfall of Junko herself, giving her despair in which she could rejoice.

She was a terrible god who delighted even in her own despair, using it to scatter destructive despair to those around her. What was she thinking, putting up the persona of Monobear?

[Wanna know why I put that program there? If Fujisaki could survive long enough to be in the final five, I'd have let you bastards get your hands on the program so you'd figure out the truth! I guess I'm a little sad that all that

effort was a waste, but I'm going to be an optimistic bear! The word surrender doesn't exist in the Monobear Dictionary!] Monobear said brightly, in stark contrast to the wary looks in the students' eyes.

[Let's see... Since we're all here, including Fukawa tied up in her room, why don't we get started on a heart-pounding, breathtaking, nausea-inducing Special Graduation Exam?]

"What...?"

Monobear ignored the students' confusion and continued.

[Don't think too hard or your brains'll break! Relax, relax. You could change the 'x' to a 'pse' and I wouldn't care! I can't bear losing out in cuteness!] Monobear rambled. Togami spoke up, clearly annoyed.

"...We already know who you are. I've had enough of your inane games. Show yourself!"

[Oh? Looks like someone doesn't have enough genre savvy! Don't you know? If you wanna drag out the mastermind from behind the veil, you have to bring out the right opponent! And you're not worth it. At all. Did you really think I'd show my face to that flimsy hope and despair you're showing me right now? Puhyahyahya...]

With a roar of laughter, Monobear resumed his explanation.

[If you pass this exam, I'll let you all graduate from the school. But if you don't... you're going to be held back. A fresh start, with refreshed memories! You're going back all the way to the beginning, from your self-introductions at the Opening Ceremony. They say people's lives don't have any reset buttons, but I'm not human. I can call the shots on hard resets and soft resets!]

Everyone but Hagakure realized what Monobear meant by the word 'reset'. In other words, they would start over from the point they found themselves at just a few days ago. Ignoring Hagakure, who glanced around asking for

an explanation, Ishimaru pointed accusingly at a nearby monitor.

"I won't stand for this! Haven't the past few days taught you that we would never resort to something as ignoble as murder?!"

[What? Are you sure?]

"Of course! No one here could possible take another's life, no matter the reason or motive!"

One of the girls in particular was looking away, standing a step away from the others with an ashen face. Sayaka Maizono, the Super High School Level Idol, stood alone and trembling.

Suddenly, someone whispered into her ear.

"What do you think, Maizono-san?"

"?!"

The overwhelming terror of the sudden sound stopped her from even turning around, but Maizono was absolutely certain that there was a Monobear standing behind herself.

"Do you agree that no one here would kill a classmate?" Monobear asked, leaning in so that Maizono alone could hear. "Speaking of, young lady... Why did you go to Naegi-kun's room last night? It's not as though anything strange happened to you or anything, right?"

"...!"

"Could this be a case of unseemly student relations? Don't you think you're betraying your fans all over the country by trying to seduce a guy? Or were you thinking of something even more sinister?"

"I..."

Maizono's trembling worsened. She stood rooted to the spot, unable to even scream. Monobear had nothing in particular to gain from breaking her composure at this point. But he wanted to see the idol fall into despair at the hideous truth about her own nature. For this reason alone he continued to drive her into a corner.

"Say, I wonder what Maizono-san here was trying to do to these friends she's known for the past two years?"

"I... I..."

Maizono's determination from the previous night, coupled with the memories Naegi recounted to her, began to eat away at her psyche like acid. As her mind began to collapse into ruin, Maizono nearly fell to her knees.

At that very moment, a clear orb flying at 168 kilometres an hour was driven straight into Monobear's jaws. The speaker inside it was destroyed, and the unit itself was thrown all the way to the wall by the force of the impact.

Maizono came to her senses and turned to the direction from which the orb had come flying. Standing there was Kuwata, breathing heavily and glaring at Monobear's remains. Hagakure, standing next to him, suddenly grabbed him by the collar.

"Eh?! What's this all about, Kuwata?! That crystal ball cost me an arm and a leg!"

Kuwata must have snatched the orb from Hagakure in search of a projectile to throw at Monobear.

"Hey, that bastard was trying to take her hostage! What was I supposed to do?"

"That crystal ball cost me a hundred million! A HUNDRED MILLION YEN! That means more bills than all the people in Japan put together!"

"Check your math, buddy! 'Sides, if the outside world's really turned into a hellhole, what's cash gonna do for you, anyway? And if things are actually fine outside, I'll make it to the Major Leagues or somethin' and pay you back! ...Uh, well, I guess I'd rather try for something other than baseball, though..."

As Kuwata and Hagakure argued amongst themselves, Maizono fell to her knees.

"Whoa! You all right, Maizono?" Kuwata asked worriedly, running over to her. Maizono looked up at him blankly.

"Kuwata-kun... There's something I want to confess to you later..."

"What, seriously?! Uh, y-you mean it?" Kuwata asked, brightening up as he forgot the gravity of the situation for a moment.

"Not just you, Kuwata-kun. I... have to tell Naegi-kun and the others, too."

Maizono had made up her mind to confess her intended crime, but Kuwata seemed to have not heard the second part of her words in his excitement. He returned to the other students with a spring in his step, slapping Yamada and Hagakure on the back and shouting cheerfully.

"Hell yeah! Better get this test over with quick and get outta this place! No way am I gonna let my sweet memories disappear!"

The Monobear on the monitor reacted to that remark.

[All right, you bastards. Since we're all charged up, how about we start your Graduation Exam?]

Oogami, who had been outside the dormitory building, stepped in to relay the state of the school building.

"The Monobears in the hallway are behaving strangely."

The students all moved towards the school building to confirm her assessment. There they saw fifty Monobears lining either side of the long hallway, with one final unit standing at the very end of the hall. There was something strange atop its head--an object closely resembling the escape switch Naegi had won at the Monomono Machine, but one size larger. As each student acknowledged this fact, an announcement came over the speakers.

[That thing the me at the end of the hall has on his head is a switch that'll open the gate to the outside. If you can get a hold of it less than fifteen seconds after you begin, I'll give it to you in place of a diploma.]

The students stirred at the surprising simplicity of the task given to them. Celes, who was alone in her tranquility, looked straight at the Monobear on the screen and addressed him.

"...There must be more to it than merely running up to take the switch."

[I'm hurt. Do I really look like a bad headmaster who'd try and get in his students' way? I'm sending you all off with a bang! Fireworks to celebrate your graduation. A hundred of them, enough for twenty seconds of partying!]

The more astute students instantly understood what this meant. The self-destruction mechanisms in each of the Monobear units would explode one after another, filling the hall with flames the moment they began their task.

[And after fifteen seconds, the me at the very end is going to sacrifice his own body to congratulate you. And this might not be relevant at that point, but that switch is a bit on the fragile side. Upupupu...]

All of this was a roundabout way of saying that Monobear had no intention of letting anyone graduate. Although the halls at Hope's Peak were wider than those of most other high schools, it was clear from the explosion they witnessed at the Entrance Ceremony that the hallway would soon be filled with hellfire. Even if someone could fortuitously make it through the flames, they would likely die of the burns on their body. Their lungs might be burned beyond repair even before that. Even if the students were to designate a sacrifice to take the challenge, their chances at success were incredibly low. At the same time, they would gain nothing from all attempting the run at once. The students' faces soon began growing dark with despair.

[Good, good... I almost want to snap a picture of you all and keep it as a souvenir!] Monobear cackled.

Oogami stepped forward.

"...I shall go. Though we have seen but one explosion, I believe that perhaps I could withstand something of such a caliber."

"Sakura-chan, no! Even you couldn't take a hundred of those explosions!" Asahina said, trying to stop her. But Oogami shook her head.

"There is no one else who stands such a chance."

Oowada then remembered the motorcycle he left in the dormitory building.

"Hold up. That bike might be enough to get through the explosions. ...I'll do it."

"You must not act in haste. Even should the motorcycle remain unscathed, there is no guarantee that you will be equally unharmed."

As Oogami and the others debated the matter of who to send in, one of the students took one step closer to the Monobears than anyone else.

"...I'll go."

"I-Ikusaba-san!" Naegi said weakly.

Ikusaba, her back to Naegi, turned her head to give him a sidelong glance and a nod. She understood exactly why Monobear had set such a one-sided challenge upon them. Why was he toying with their hopes now, when he had already won?

Junko is already planning for the next game of despair. After all, she's going to erase our memories again regardless of what happens now.

She just wants to see use in despair because she feels like having fun...

Because Ikusaba knew this side of her sister's character well, she was also certain that the escape switch at the end of the hall was real. When Junko Enoshima fought to bring despair to others, she always made sure that there was a chance that she would instead be inflicted despair upon. Just as she had left traces of Fujisaki's program inside Monobear, she could not be satisfied unless she allowed for the slight risk of her own destruction. It was a compulsion very much suited to the Super High School Level Despair.

This was why Ikusaba was certain that she herself was the only one who stood a chance--she made up her mind to run the gauntlet herself, even if it meant putting her life on the line.

As she was now, Ikusaba wanted to live. She wanted to become a part of this world that she had never been interested in before. Although she had no idea whether she should label her hesitation a disappointment, she wanted to survive and find a new path. A path that would allow her to leave the world of despair and live on, accepting the sins of the past.

Ikusaba, once known as a killing machine, found her heart set upon by indescribable terror. She had never once thought about the fact that survival required determination. And as though in an attempt to shake off that fear, she said in a quiet voice:

"Naegi-kun... Thank you."

Disappointingly enough, the words she directed to the boy who had shown her a future full of possibilities never reached his ears. But Oogami, who had heard her, replied with a grimace.

"...If it is repentance by death you seek, I shall stop you by force if I must."

There was a severity in her voice tinged with unmistakable pride. Ikusaba felt a twinge of envy for Oogami, who had also dedicated her life to battle, and whispered something to her.

"..."

"What? ...Are you certain?"

Just as Oogami's frown deepened, Monobear's voice rang out in the hall.

[Let the Graduation Exam begin! Ready, go!]

They had time for neither criticism nor question. The Monobear at the very front exploded in a wave of heat and noise that filled the hall. But Ikusaba did not look away from the blasts--instead, she took action, supported by rigid determination.

Dangan Ronpa IF

Monobear's Chamber

The moment the Graduation Exam began, the mastermind focused her attention entirely on the Monobear with the escape switch. She could read her older sister's actions with ease--what the superhuman killing machine would focus on, with her incredible skill with weaponry.

And as Junko watched the scene through Monobear's eyes, the world unfolded before her as she had predicted.

A pointed metal pipe emerged from the flames caused by the explosions, headed straight for the weak point of the unit with the escape switch--the point where the detonation system for the bomb and the unit's support system overlapped.

Ikusaba's attack came at a perfect angle, like an arrow shot by a master archer. The superhuman girl known as Mukuro Ikusaba had acted to bring despair to Monobear--the mastermind--by piercing through the same point as she had attacked in the infirmary by lobbing the pipe like a javelin.

The makeshift spear defeated all logic, coming at Monobear with accuracy and speed that could not be possible in a flame-filled hallway.

The mastermind knew. Mukuro Ikusaba had brought despair to the world with this power of hers, because power was all this disappointing girl had to her name. But not even that would be enough to take down Monobear. The mastermind, having already predicted that Ikusaba would put all her efforts into the throw, had controlled Monobear to catch the metal pipe as though catching a blade coming down a split second before it made contact.

The force of the impact pushed the unit back several yards, but the pointed end of the pipe, still angled exactly as Ikusaba had thrown it, was never able to stop Monobear's functions.

You really are a disappointment.

Junko changed her perspective, turning to another monitor. She wanted to see the look on her sister's face as she stood at the doors to the dormitory, seeing that her desperate throw had amounted to nothing. To be specific, the mastermind wanted to see how much despair she could cause in Ikusaba when the final Monobear--and the escape switch atop it--were blown to smithereens. She wanted to carve the image of her disappointing sister's newfound hope sinking into despair again.

Following her impulses, Junko turned to the camera that watched the doors to the dorms in search of her sister. But the only person she saw was Oogami, who seemed to have just finished an attack.

"...?"

For one whole second Junko was lost in confusion. The despair-inducingly powerful mastermind then understood what was happening, and turned back to the last Monobear.

That one wasted second would go on to cause Junko a small amount of despair.

There were three seconds left.

It blitzed through the smoke, fire, and heat in the hallway like a bullet. Despite its icy mask it glared at Monobear with fire in its eyes.

With sharpness,

With speed,

With strength,

It revealed itself to the school of despair, becoming a weapon that cut through all in its path.

Two seconds left.

Monobear, still holding the pipe at the same angle, made to move--but at the same time, 'it' appeared before him from beyond the flames. Its body, though unscarred by years of fighting on the battlefields, was being licked by flames and hit by shrapnel, leaving it with countless wounds and injuries.

And yet it did not waver. There was no fear in its eyes.

One second left.

'It'--Mukuro Ikusaba, who had become a living weapon--used her knee to hammer in the back of the metal pipe Monobear was still holding. The pipe was driven into the unit like a nail, tearing apart the detonation and support systems at once.

Zero seconds.

A hundred explosions later, the hallway was filled with smoke. Ikusaba had rolled on the floor with Monobear, holding the immaculate escape switch in her hand.

In other words, the students of Hope's Peak Academy had passed their Graduation Exam.

This was the circumstance behind the little despair that came upon Monobear in these three seconds.

Dangan Ronpa IF

First floor hallway

"Say, Junko?"

Ikusaba said to Monobear, who was unable to move or destroy himself. However, his communication functions seemed to be intact. A voice escaped his speakers, mingled in with a great deal of static.

"Upupupu... To think you'd resort to something like that..." The voice changer still seemed to be functioning, judging from Monobear's voice. "I must have overestimated you. Getting help from someone on a battlefield?"

"When I give you the signal, give me a roundhouse kick and propel me forward."

This was what Ikusaba had said to Oogami the moment before the explosions began. The moment she lobbed the metal pipe at Monobear, Ikusaba leapt into the air, the soles of her feet meeting Oogami's at the precise moment that the latter unleashed a kick. Combining her own strength with Oogami's, Ikusaba had propelled herself at Monobear with the Super High School Level Wrestler as her launch pad.

The intense G-forces threatened to take away her consciousness, but she forced herself awake, withstanding even the fire and shrapnel that overtook her as she felled both her despair and the explosions.

Ikusaba had faith in her sister. Junko Enoshima would predict the metal rod being thrown and would react accordingly--then she would turn her attention to her older sister in order to relish the look of despair in her eyes. Though Ikusaba was unable predict Junko's attempt to murder her with Gungnir, this time she had read her sister perfectly.

But all Monobear had for her was scorn.

"You put your life and trust in someone else for a life-or-death challenge? What is this, Mediocrity Central? It's... tepid. Disappointing. This time, I guess I'll just say I lost to myself because I never saw this much disappointment coming. Happy, happy."

But Ikusaba shook her head.

"No, Junko. That's not it."

"Oh?"

"In terms of winning and losing... I think... we'd already lost a long time ago." Ikusaba said hesitantly, her eyes wandering as she attempted to sort out everything she wanted to say.

"The reason you erased everyone's memories must be because... the way they were before, you didn't think they'd kill one another, even if they fell into despair. They're different from the other people you toyed with like this. You were sure they'd never hurt each other unless you erased their memories, right?"

"What are you talking about?"

"So, um... It's all right, Junko. One day, I... I'm going to bring back everyone's memories, and show you their happiness and... relationships, I think? I'll show it all to you, and make you despair even more."

Ikusaba finished with a final nod. Monobear was silent for a few moments.

"You finally get the best of me, and that's all you can say? You're a total disappointment! You never gave me despair. You were just disappointing all around!" Monobear spat, as though convincing himself of his superiority.

"But you guys are coming back here. I guarantee it." He added, his tone unchanged.

"..."

"And next time, I'll invite you somewhere nice. I found myself an interesting island while I was running things here... Upupupupu... Upupupupupupupupu..."

After one final burst of laughter, even the static faded. Monobear's remains finally went silent. He would say no more for some time, no matter how much they shouted at him. The mastermind had already begun preparations to bring about a new despair into the world, which included the students and Junko Enoshima herself.

In the end, she never removed the persona of Monobear. Junko Enoshima would never show her face, as though she were venting her frustration at the despair she found herself in. Thinking this way, Ikusaba almost fell victim to despair--but the moment she heard the voices of her classmates calling to her, she locked that despair away deep in her heart.

From this point on, she would seal away all of her despair. And one day, she would unleash it all on her little sister--the perfect storm of despair, which would send them both plummeting into the abyss.

Ikusaba would never leave her sister behind. This was, after all, the first hope the disappointing elder sister had held since childhood.

Dangan Ronpa IF

Hours later, in front of the gates

"Ikusaba-san... Are you really going to go out with that wig on?" Naegi asked. He had been given a transfusion of the correct blood type, and was slowly showing signs of recovery.

Ikusaba, who had put on the wig she used to dress up as Junko, nodded.

"...I think... If I pretend to be her, I might understand Junko's thoughts a little better..." She said, but her tone was still her own. Ikusaba had yet to completely get her thoughts in order.

"And... I've made up my mind. As long as I'm out there... I'm going to accept everyone's resentment at me... and Junko. I'm not going to die until I've destroyed all the despair Junko spread, but..."

The damage caused to the world by Super High School Level Despair could not be measured in terms of economy, society, or even the number of human lives. The television broadcasts had already outed Junko Enoshima and Mukuro Ikusaba as the central figures in this disaster.

Of the people outside who remained untainted by despair, the sisters were irredeemable criminals. And to the people clad in Monobear masks who were tearing the world apart, Ikusaba was now a traitor.

She was now in the despair-inducing situation of being the enemy of the entire world. But perhaps this was nothing so significant to Ikusaba.

"But... I'm going to do my best... so they don't get me while my guard is down."

"Isn't it safer for you to just turn yourself in to the cops? Well, can't say if they'd put you on death row or not, but you might stand a chance at lengthening out the trials enough to die of old age, eh?" Hagakure suggested,

but Ikusaba shook her head.

"There are no laws, or even police officers now..."

"S-seriously? Maybe we'd be better off stayin'..." Hagakure said nervously. Togami sneered.

"Silence, commoner. Someone like you won't find a very different fate whether you're in this school or the outside world." Although he was shaken when he was told that the Togami family had collapsed, he was being quite brazen in front of Ikusaba now.

"I will spare you this time because you are an extremely valuable asset. And depending on your actions hereafter, I may even absolve you of your crimes once I've built up a new world." It was rather like Togami to claim he could acquit a world-ending terrorist.

"...I don't need an incentive like that. I... I don't intend to keep only myself alive."

Turning away from Togami, Ikusaba looked around at the other students. Kirigiri stood silently with a look of readiness. Fukawa, who had just turned back from Genocider Syo, was gesticulating in confusion. Everyone was reacting in their own way. And as she looked back at the past two years spent with them, Ikusaba handed the escape switch to Naegi, who shared those memories.

"Naegi-kun. You do it."

"Huh? Me?"

"I think... This is for the best."

As Naegi hesitantly received the switch, Ikusaba remembered Monobear's words.

"But you guys are coming back here. I guarantee it."

She knew that Monobear was correct. This school still housed something they needed to bring back the others' memories--the research files belonging to Yasuke Matsuda, the Super High School Level Neurologist. Perhaps the students could still restore the bonds forged between them in the past two years.

But as long as the key to restoring their memories remained locked up inside the school, the mastermind could easily repeat her game of despair. The island she mentioned also bothered them, but at this point they could not avert their gaze from despair.

"Then... Here goes."

Naegi had remembered the state of the outside world. The boy who had in the past decided to live inside the school was now choosing to step outside. How much had he struggled over his decision?

But Naegi was determined to face the despair outside head-on, not showing a hint of his internal struggle to the others. And it was Ikusaba's goal to protect his hopes while bringing despair to her beloved sister. She no longer knew if what lay at the end of the path was hope or despair.

Pressing the wig down firmly over her head, Ikusaba hid her face with her arms.

Was she smiling because of the hope shining in her future? Or was she crying because what lay before her was despair?

Once her arms came back down, there was no longer any emotion in her face. She no longer knew what kind of a face she should wear. And at the same time, Naegi pressed down on the escape switch. The firearms withdrew into the ceiling as a siren began wailing.

Soon, a light appeared from beyond the gate.

An infinite IF enveloped the students and the world, equally accepting hope, despair, and the heart of the disappointing girl.